Broken Ties...

CHARLES ELMO ROBINSON

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Author, "Victory," "Lifted Shadows," "Guided Hearts," "The Winning of Aliene," etc.

The author has again presented to the Christian public one of the outstanding novels of the day. "Broken Ties" will carry you to the heights of youth's young dream, wherein Wilmer Coltrane, being fired with the ambition of youth, leaves a suburban home in his early teens and finds employment on a farm. Struggling against difficulties, he lays aside from his meagre income small savings to defray college expenses. Ambitious in the field of civil engineering, his one hoped-for goal is that of a famous bridge builder.

In his early college days, his teachers present to him a new religion which is strangely different from that which he had received from a loving mother. Yet, perhaps mother was a little old-fashioned! Finally Wilmer accepts the new religious teaching. Then one day a childhood sweetheart, Ethel Fulbright, writes Wilmer that she, too, in an exclusive girls' college, has embraced the doctrine of Atheism.

Soon after graduation, God begins to take a hand in the affairs of the young college man and gradually he returns to the old-fashioned teachings of his mother, finally entering the field of evangelism. Ethel Fulbright also finds Christ and two young lives are united to the glory of the all-wise Creator.

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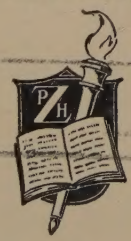

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EIGHT-FIFTEEN FRANKLIN STREET
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

CHAPTER ONE

"WILMER," called the pleasant voice of the nurse, "your Ma wants you."

The sad-faced boy reached the ground almost instantly from the platform he had built high among the branches of a giant weeping willow standing near the back door of the modest home in Parsons, Kansas. The speed of his descent was the result of much practice. Hastening to his mother's room, Wilmer gazed anxiously into the fever-bright eyes and emaciated features of his darling mother. He noted how very short of breath she seemed to be. The eleven-year-old boy inquired, "What is it, Ma? What can I do for you—something?"

On his platform retreat in the willow, watching the marvelous panorama of clouds marching across the heavens, Wilmer Coltrane had been trying desperately to be brave while meditating sadly on the doctor's warning that his precious mother would not be with them long. He loved the wonderful God, who so delicately tinted the shining vapor ships, knowing well the while that all their beauty would be obliterated by the fast approaching shades of night. Wilmer liked to

look at beautiful things, and he loved God for making things beautiful.

"Sit down, Wilmer. I have something to say that you will be sorry to hear. I am glad you love God. He will help you to bear it. I am going to die, Wilmer; possibly tonight or tomorrow—very soon."

"O Ma! Did the doctor say that?"

"Don't cry, Darling," she gasped. "God will help you. I have very little breath and a good deal to say. Stop crying if you can and try to listen very carefully. Kneel down here, precious boy, so I can touch your face. So— that's right. I have galloping consumption. I shall not be here much longer. Mr. Henshaw has just left. I have transferred to him one hundred thousand dollars' worth of non-taxable bonds in trust for you. They pay four per cent. On your fourteenth birthday, Mr. Henshaw will pay you two hundred dollars. Every birthday of yours after that, including your twenty-third, he will pay you one hundred dollars more than he paid you the time before. When you are twenty-four, he will deliver the bonds to you as your own."

"I don't care anything about bonds, Ma. I want you!"

"I know, Darling, but you cannot have me. I have to leave you. Your father is a good man. I want you to be very careful to do as he says. He is not able to make much money though. He works hard and is always hopeful, thinking he can begin to make money, but his plans fail. I am leaving him five thousand

dollars. I hope that and the increasing sums Mr. Henshaw will pay you will take care of both of you until you are grown."

A fit of coughing stopped the dying woman's speech, and when it was over, she looked to Wilmer as if she had died. "Is she—is she dead?" he asked the nurse.

"No, dear boy, but she will not be able to speak to you again tonight. It will be best for you to go out of the room. Your being here might disturb her, make her try to talk again. Possibly she can speak to you in the morning."

Although twilight had fallen, Wilmer fled to his place in the weeping willow. Higher up among the branches a bird spoke a few sleepy words as though he were talking in his sleep, Wilmer thought. The owl that lived in the hollow trunk of the old black gum by the barn announced that she was starting out on her nightly occupation of making a living. Her cry seemed very sad to Wilmer, as though she feared she must starve to death or had lost her last friend. He felt that way himself and almost wished he could utter a sound as clearly indicative of his feeling of desolation as was that of the little screech owl. When he finally slid down from the tree platform and entered the house, he found his father in the sitting-room, gazing through slowly falling tears into the fireplace, where a fire had been started. Wilmer realized that his father too knew that she who ever since Wilmer could remember had been the light and life of the home, was

going to be taken away, never to return. He sat down near his father without saying a word.

After a while the man said, "What can we do without your little mother, Wilmer? The doctor says she may leave us tonight."

"She told me that herself a little while ago, Daddy. We'll be awful lonesome; but she'll not have to cough anymore, will she?"

"I suppose not, Son; but I don't know much about that. I have not thought much about such things. I wish now I had listened to her and had let her show me how to accept the Lord as my Savior."

There was a long pause in which the only sound Wilmer heard was a katydid, who seemed to be mournfully telling in ceaseless iteration about Katy's doings. Then: "She has often tried to show me, but she will never try again. I have never been able to do *anything* without her. I suppose I shall not be able to find Jesus without her."

Wilmer went to bed feeling sure he could not sleep for crying, but the next thing he knew he was awakened by the bright shining of the sun on his bed. The night was gone. How strange that he had been able to sleep! Was his darling mother still alive? At the sickroom door the nurse, with finger on lips, stopped him: "You may stand and look at her a few moments, Wilmer; but you must not make the least bit of noise. She may go at any moment."

On the way back from the cemetery, George Coltrane

hugged the boy close as they each stared with unseeing eyes at the passing landscape. Their faces were haggard, but no tears could be seen. Not a word was said. Their world had suddenly come to an end. Neither of them knew what to do. Marcia Coltrane had been leaned upon so heavily and so constantly by her husband that, now that her support was gone, he felt he would stagger if he tried to walk.

In one view of the matter, losing his wife was good for George Coltrane. During her lifetime he had never paid any attention to the running of the home, trusting his wife to make all the decisions, the more readily as it was her money that was providing for the family. Now he had to assume the responsibilities he had always shirked. He had to buy things and pay for them. He knew there was five thousand dollars in the bank subject to his check, but he began to pride himself on drawing as little from the bank as he could. This added responsibility gave him something to think about, and with his mind thus occupied, the days did not seem so long.

One day, however, when his wife had been dead six months, Coltrane was rudely jarred by seeing Wilmer smoking a cigarette. *He* had never smoked. His father and his father's father had never touched tobacco. It had never occurred to him that any Coltrane would ever smoke. From his earliest recollection he had been taught that tobacco was a weed that no Coltrane would use. He sat down with his boy and told him all of this, recounting to him what he himself had been told

as a child about how undesirable a thing it is to smoke. After this, Wilmer, very eager to do whatever he could to please his father, felt a sort of family pride in telling his friends when they laughed at him for not smoking that *the Coltranes do not smoke*—had not done so for several generations.

But this experience with Wilmer set Coltrane to thinking about his boy's need for better care. Wilmer was being neglected. He was failing in his father's duty; he must do better. In fact, he must get help. Black Carrie was not enough even though her big, generous heart did move her to the most painstaking care of the only child of her beloved "Miss Marcia." He must get a good woman to come and be a second mother to his boy; a boy needs a mother. What would he have been if he had not had a mother? He must look around. Maybe some good woman who needed a home would be willing to come and be a mother to Wilmer. Something like bashfulness checked him, however, when he was about to speak of these things to his boy.

Several months later, Coltrane called Wilmer and, hugging him affectionately, said, "Son, I am going to get a new mother for you. A boy surely needs a mother. The lady you have seen me with a time or two has consented to come and be your mother. We are going to get married."

"*Jerry's* no good."

"Well, Wilmer, maybe we can help Jerry to be good. What is the matter with Jerry?"

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN George Coltrane and Elizabeth McTavish were married, Wilmer had almost reached his thirteenth birthday. He was three months older than Jerry. His motherless life had been so desolate, notwithstanding all he and his father and Carrie had been able to do to alleviate its loneliness, that he looked forward with yearning to having a mother again.

When she came and smiled sweetly upon him as she drew him close in a loving embrace, calling him her precious boy, he yielded to her blandishments without reserve. He even allowed her to kiss him. He made up his mind he would do his very best to get along with Jerry. It is true his new mother did not fill the vacancy left by the departure of his own darling mother, but she was far and away better than none.

Elizabeth entered upon her new duties with enthusiasm. Her mother heart reached out hungrily to the lonely boy, and she set about making him as happy as she possibly could. She hugged him and kissed him and called him pet names until Wilmer was quite intoxicated with the wonderful experience.

"I am happy, George," she confided when Coltrane

came home at the end of the first day he went to work after the marriage. "Seems to me I enjoy the love Wilmer is giving me almost as much as I do the love *you* bestow upon me. I am glad for the chance you have given me to supply to Wilmer the need he has felt so keenly since Marcia died. It is terrible for a boy not to have a mother."

"That all sounds good, Elizabeth. It sounds fine."

"Jerry needs a father, too. He and I have felt it poignantly ever since Mr. McTavish died. I feel confident our arrangement for the care and training of our boys will prove an unmixed blessing to each of them. They will make fine men."

Carrie went faithfully about her duties, doing her work carefully and hoping for the best, but often she shook her woolly head and sighed. When she overheard Jerry reporting to his mother the details of some small trouble, laying on Wilmer all the blame that attached and taking to himself all the praise, her heart grew heavy with foreboding. Her "Lambie" was all she had left of her much beloved young mistress, Marcia. She knew she would not be able to do much to protect Wilmer, but she meant to do all she could.

Mrs. Coltrane kept her purse in the top drawer of the dresser in her bedroom. One day Jerry had company. Wilmer was in his own room deeply engrossed in the *Adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson.* Carrie heard the boys bemoaning the fact that they didn't have a bat. Presently she heard stealthy foot-

steps slipping into Mrs. Coltrane's room. Then came silence for a time, followed by the hilarious shouting of boys playing ball. She could hear them striking the ball with a bat. Wilmer, however, was so engrossed in the account of how the Robinson family built their home in a great tree, to which they ascended by a rope ladder, that he knew nothing about the bat.

When Mrs. Coltrane came home she called Jerry as she entered the house, telling him he must go to the store and get a loaf of bread for supper. She and Jerry went into the room together and she opened her purse to give Jerry the dime for the bread. The purse was empty. "Someone has been into my purse," she exclaimed, astonished. "I had two dimes. They are both gone."

"Wilmer must have taken them," accused Jerry.

"Oh, I do hope not. Where is Wilmer?"

"In his room, I guess. He's not been with us all afternoon."

"Wilmer," the woman called from the foot of the stairs, "come here."

"Yes, ma'am," Wilmer responded, as he spread his open book face down on the bed, "I'm coming."

"Wilmer, someone has taken two dimes out of my purse. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, ma'am. I've been upstairs reading *Swiss Family Robinson* all afternoon."

"Carrie," called the lady, now quite aroused. When the black woman appeared, Mrs. Coltrane said, "Some-

one has taken two dimes out of my purse. Do you know anything about it?"

"No'm, not edzactly. I heared Jerry and some boys complaining about their not having a bat. Then I heared some un slip into you alls' room and out again. Then for a while I didn't hear anything. Then I heared the boys begin playing ball, and I could hear them strike the ball with a bat."

"You are not hinting that Jerry stole my money are you, Carrie?"

"No'm, I'm not hintin'. I jest tol' you what I heared."

"Did you boys get a bat, Jerry?"

"Milt did. We went over to his house and got his'n. He has a new one, never been used."

"Well, I don't know who took the money but, of course, Jerry, I know you wouldn't do a thing like that. I wish I knew *you* didn't take it, Wilmer. Of course someone took it. It lies between you and Carrie."

"Carrie didn't steal your old dimes," Wilmer flared, stirred to great anger by the aspersion cast on his old friend. "I don't need to ask her whether she did or not. I *know* she didn't do any such dirty thing as that."

"Well, neither do I think Carrie took them, so I suppose all we can do is to let it rest. I must warn you though, Wilmer, that stealing is an awful sin and will bring about the worst possible results."

"You don't need to be hintin' that *I* stole your money. I never stole a thing in all my life. I am a

Christian, and I don't steal. But I know Jerry steals, and I know he lies. I don't know he stole this money, but he has stolen other things. All the boys know he is a stealer."

"Wilmer!" shouted the woman. "What *are* you saying? Do you know what you are saying? Do you know that you are saying that Jerry is a thief? Do you know that?"

Wilmer didn't know that a mother will stand up for her son, utterly unable to see the force of what to others is conclusive proof that *her* boy is guilty. He didn't know that this is the nature of a woman, and that for his stepmother to believe any evil report against her son would be for her to go contrary to the very essence of motherhood. If he had known these things, possibly he could have retained some measure of respect for his new mother. But, not knowing, he flamed, "I am just telling what I know." With that he whirled and ran to his own room.

All the beautiful visions of boundless joy and deep soul satisfaction that had been his because he had a mother again, suddenly crashed about Wilmer's ears, "like the watchtower of a town which an earthquake shatters down." He felt himself worse off than he had been with no mother at all. Then he was lonely, and often cried himself to sleep, leaving the marks on the pillowcase to be seen by the morning's light. But now he was lonely and hurt, wronged by her from whom he had hoped for so much.

When Coltrane had been told all about the trying

experiences of the afternoon, Wilmer, from the seclusion of his room, heard his father's voice, "Wilmer, come here."

When with sad mien the boy stood before his father, the man said: "Your mother says you were very rude to her this afternoon, and that you accused Jerry of being a liar and a thief. Your mother is in her room weeping over the way you have torn down all her happy plans for a lovely home. I have to punish you. You may go to your room now. You may have something to eat when breakfast time comes."

"But, Daddy—"

"I don't care to hear anything from you. Jerry and his mother each say you did it. There can be no excuse. I am very angry. Go to your room before I lose control of myself and give you a whipping."

After a while Wilmer heard his father and stepmother go out the gate, and from what he overheard he knew they were taking Jerry to the show. Almost as soon as they were gone, Carrie came up with a nice supper.

"Ol' Carrie can't do much," she pitied, "but what she kin do, she shore gwine do for her bressed little Lambie. You don' need to come down to breakfas' if you don' want to, Lambie. Carrie'll find some way to bring you somepin' good."

Although Wilmer's troubles were great, when bedtime came he slept. Feeling too crushed and outraged to face the family at the morning meal, he remained

in his room. He hoped his father would come up and give him a chance to explain, but that individual was too busy making love to his wife to bother about a mere broken-hearted boy.

About nine the next morning when Carrie came with his breakfast, she explained: "I couldn't git hyah no soonah, no ways, Lambie. Mistah Coltrane's jes lef'."

"I'm going to run away, Carrie. I can't stay here."

"I thought maybe you'd do that, Lambie. It breaks my ol' haht to have you go, but maybe it'd be bes'. Take this dollah. It's all ah got. You'll need it. Ah wish ah had mo'."

Carrying his little suitcase in which, with Carrie's help he had packed his belongings, Wilmer slipped down the back stairway and out into the alley. As he turned the corner into the highway, he looked back at the home he was leaving. He had never known any other. There he had been born. There his beloved young mother had died. There the only friend he had on earth remained. In spite of all he could do, the tears flowed. He had no idea where he could go, but he started to walk.

"Hello, Wilmer," he heard a cheery voice saying, and a car stopped by his side. "Jump in, Son. Riding's better than walking."

Wilmer had often heard his mother speak very lovingly of Mr. Henshaw, and when he saw that gentleman's smiling face and the car door swing open invitingly, the boy got in without a moment's hesitation. After Henshaw, by cautious, loving questions had

wormed out of the boy the whole story of his grief, he said, "You mustn't run away, Wilmer. You just can't. It's mighty bad to be a boy with no home and no money."

"I can't stay where *she* is," Wilmer frowned, as the unwanted tears started again. "Daddy thinks there's no one but her. Carrie is the only friend I have."

"It is hard, Wilmer," the banker sympathized. "It's mighty hard, but it's not so hard as being without any home at all."

"Do you think I ought to go back?"

"I have a lot of money that your precious little mother left with me for you, Wilmer. I can't pay any of it to you until your fourteenth birthday, but that won't be so long now. You stick it out at home until you are fourteen, and then I'll approve of your going. I can let you have money then, and that will be lots better."

"I can't go back where she is."

"I used to have horses, Wilmer, and I hired a hostler to take care of them. He slept in the barn. There are no horses there now, but the bed he slept in is still there. I'll have clean linen put on the bed today, and tonight after dark you may slip in there and sleep. You may sleep there tomorrow night, too. Do you ever pray, Wilmer?"

"I used to, but not anymore."

"Well, it's a mighty good thing to do. God loves you, Wilmer. You sleep in my barn and be sure to

pray. I don't want people to know I am keeping you; so you slip in after dark without letting anyone see you and leave before daylight. Should you like to do that, Boy?"

"I should."

"Well, after you have been there two nights, if you pray, I think you will see it is best for you to go back home. When you do, I don't want you to let them know that you slept in my barn. Just keep still, and if it gets too hard for you again, any time you may come and stay two more nights. I don't want you to stay away from home more than two nights at any one time. When you can't stand it any longer, you may come and stay two nights in my barn. Will you agree to that, Wilmer? I want to help you, and if you'll do as I say, pretty soon you'll be fourteen and then I can give you money and, if you still think it best, you can leave altogether. What do you say, Wilmer?"

"I'll do it. Ma always thought much of you, Mr. Henshaw. I think she'd be glad if she knew I minded you."

"I was very fond of your little mother, Wilmer, all her life. She was my dearest friend's little girl, and I loved her. Now I've been driving around the town, so we are not much farther away than we were when you got into the car. You may get out here in this lonely place while no one is around to see. Here is a dollar for you to live on until you go back home. Be a brave boy, Wilmer, and when you go back treat

your stepmother as well as you possibly can. Good-by, Son. God bless you."

"Good-by," responded the boy almost cheerfully, as the car passed on and left him standing alone on the edge of a fringe of woods near the river.

CHAPTER THREE

"CALLIE," sparkled Henshaw that afternoon as he drew his wife's arm through his own and walked away with her for a little private talk, "I am conspiring, and I want you to help me."

"Conspiring, Albert! I never thought I should be a conspirator. The word has a distinctly sinister sound; but any conspiracy you are engaged in will be all right and you may count on my help."

"Right nobly spoken, *ma chere*. I trust I shall not live to see the day when something has made you change your views. The thing we were morally certain would happen has come to pass. Jerry McTavish has accused Wilmer Coltrane of having stolen a couple of dimes from Mrs. Coltrane's purse. The testimony of black Carrie made it practically certain that Jerry himself was the culprit, but Mrs. Coltrane, after the time-honored fashion of women in her circumstances, could not possibly believe that *her* boy was guilty, and, as there was no other choice, she decided that Wilmer was the thief.

"When she intimated as much Wilmer told her he didn't know who had stolen the dimes but that *Jerry* had stolen other things and had lied about it when

accused. Then the fat *was* in the fire. She exploded and spilled all over the place. When George came home, she and Jerry recounted to him the details of the clash, and George is so lovesick and love-blind that he swallowed the whole report and decided that Wilmer—Wilmer Coltrane, mind you, a boy whom anyone in this town would trust anywhere with anything—had stolen the dimes. Coltrane refused to listen to any explanation by Wilmer and sent him to his room without his supper. Black Carrie slipped Wilmer some supper in his room, and this morning she managed to get a breakfast up to him. He decided to leave—"

"Why, Albert! He can't do that. He's too young to be without a home. *Poor child!*"

"Well, Carrie helped him pack, and he started off. She gave him a dollar, which was all she had. I passed him on the highway and picked him up. After a while, when I had got all these facts out of him and had made an arrangement with him to keep him a couple of nights—"

"Aren't you afraid to do that, Albert? People might take sides against *you*."

"I told him about the bed in the barn where Pete used to sleep. It is there that I need your help in my conspiracy. I told him I'd put clean linen on that bed and that he might slip in there after dark without anyone's seeing him and leave in the morning before daylight."

"I wonder whether he can wake up soon enough."

"I told him to pray. He says he has about quit praying. I told him he might sleep there a couple of nights, and that then he is to go back home and be as nice to his stepmother as he can."

"Isn't it too dreadful to think about, that Marcia Fullerton's baby should be harassed like that?"

"I made an agreement with him that when he goes home he will stay as long as he can, but that if something else comes up that is just too hard, he may come again and stay a couple of nights in the barn. He is not to stay there more than two nights at a time. It won't be very long until he is fourteen. Then I can pay him some of his money, and things will not be so bad."

As Wilmer saw Henshaw's car disappear down the road, the loneliness which he had momentarily almost lost while he had counseled with his mother's good friend, Banker Henshaw, swept over him again with engulfing force. He had no home; no mother, and his father had gone over to the enemy. That hurt worst of all. To be accused of being a thief by her whom he had begun to love so fervently was hard, too. To have Jerry lie about him and smirk as he saw his lie being believed, was not so bad. He had known Jerry would act that way.

He had left his suitcase in Mr. Henshaw's car. He would find it when he got to his bedroom in the barn. Passing through a skirt of timber, he came to the river. He wanted to look again at the bridge that spanned

the river's width — look long and wistfully until his soul was satisfied. Nothing else he had ever seen held his rapt attention as a great bridge. Anything, everything about a great bridge always had been intensely interesting to him. Today he would find a place of vantage and gaze at the bridge until he could *see* it. It takes time to see anything one loves, especially so big and grand a thing as a bridge. He congratulated himself on having plenty of time for this delightful occupation.

As he emerged from the brush onto the river bank a surprised voice accosted him, " 'Lo, Wilmer; thought you'd be at school."

It was Pete Smith, one of the town's unschooled boys. No truant officer dogged his footsteps, so Pete put in his time wherever he would, happy as the days were long.

When Wilmer slipped silently and secretly into the hostler's old room, he was astonished to find Mr. Henshaw himself stretching out his hand of smiling welcome.

"This being your first night away from home, Wilmer, I knew you would feel strange and lonesome, so I brought my Bible along to do my reading here."

When Wilmer had given Henshaw an account of his companionship with Pete Smith, of his having helped Pete dress the fish, of being invited by Mrs. Smith to stay for supper, and of Mr. Smith's coming home not quite sober, Henshaw said, "There is lots of good about Pete, but when he becomes a man he

will find that his not going to school was a grave mistake. Maybe you can make your misfortune prove a blessing to Pete."

"I'd like to, Mr. Henshaw. I liked Pete pretty well today. Never played with him before. I was sorry for his mother, though—they're so poor. She's good to Pete, and she was good to me."

When Wilmer had been away from home three days and two nights, and it was almost bedtime, he slipped in where Carrie was.

"O Lambie!" the black woman exclaimed, as she sprang up and gave him the gladdest of welcomes. "You're back. I'm so glad."

"Where's she?"

"They've all three gone to the show. They'll be back any minute now."

"I'll go up to my room before they come. If anyone asks anything about me so you have a chance, tell 'em I'll be down to breakfast in the morning. Could you give me a glass of milk or a sandwich, Carrie? I missed my supper."

In the morning, when Wilmer heard his stepmother call Jerry to breakfast, he came down. No one expected him, and they were surprised.

"Well, Wilmer, you are back," deprecated Coltrane. "Not having a home didn't prove to be so good as you thought, did it? I hope you have learned your lesson. Sit down to the table. Bring another plate, Carrie."

"It was a hard lesson to learn," Wilmer lamented; "but I have been trying. I am sorry I hurt your feelings, Mother. I shall try not to do it again."

"Well, that sounds more like it, Wilmer. If you will do right, I am sure we can get on. We have had it nice and peaceable ever since you have been gone."

Thus life at home began again for Wilmer. His father paid very little attention to him, being altogether taken up with making love to Mrs. Coltrane. The boy's stepmother was by no means as cordial and loving as she had been at first, but she refrained from saying cutting things.

At the close of school the next day Wilmer found Pete waiting for him.

"I missed you at the river today," Pete explained. "I been thinking 'bout when I'm grown up. If I don't know books, it'll be bad for me, as you said. I'm going to start to school in the morning."

"That will be fine, Pete. You will have to go into the class downstairs, but you are smart. You can soon catch up with fellows of your own age, if you work like sixty. I will help you."

Helping Pete with his lessons gave Wilmer something pleasant to do out of school hours. Taking Henshaw's advice, he resolutely remained silent when falsely accused by Jerry. He said nothing when his stepmother punished him for something Jerry had done which that youngster had laid onto Wilmer.

Occasionally he and Henshaw had long talks together, and the banker highly approved of Wilmer's

great desire to become a bridge builder. To do this, however, he explained to Wilmer, a fine education would be necessary, and so the best thing he could do until his fourteenth birthday was to bear whatever he had to endure at home and let it pass right out of mind so his mistreatment would not interfere with his studies.

Wilmer's birthday was the twentieth of May, and as his troubles increased rather than diminished, he looked forward to that day with almost intolerable longing. He was reproved and otherwise punished so often that it seemed to him almost impossible to continue to answer nothing.

On the Friday night before Wilmer would be fourteen on the following Monday, Coltrane, in great heat, sent the boy supperless to his room, not to come down until he was ready to apologize to his stepmother. When Carrie brought him his supper that night, Wilmer said, "Carrie, I am going to leave. This time I shall not come back. I shall miss you awful, but *you* see I can't stand this any longer. I shall be fourteen next Monday, and Mr. Henshaw will give me the money my mother left for me. Then I shall take the train and get out of here. Won't I be glad! You don't know how glad I shall be, Carrie."

"O Lambie! What'll ol' Carrie do? You's all I got lef' o' yo' ma. I don' know w'at I's gwine do."

"Mr. Henshaw can't give me much. Mother told me how much. But as soon as I can, I will send you some money, Carrie. You have been mighty good to

me. Maybe I could get you a job in the place where I find work. Would you come if I could?"

"I sho would, Lambie. Nothin' lef' hyah fo' me."

Wilmer set his alarm for five the next morning, and when he went down quietly to the kitchen, he found a nice, hot breakfast waiting for him. Saturday and Sunday he spent with Pete on the river, and at night he slept in the barn.

Before it was really light on Monday, the mockingbird that often sat on the comb of the barn began his songs of praise. Two roosters crowed, sometimes one at a time, sometimes together. The cow mooed for her calf, and the pigs began to squeal for their breakfast. As the morning light brightened in Wilmer's room, he became slowly conscious of these homely sounds and sat up. *It was the twentieth day of May.* He was fourteen, and Mr. Henshaw would pay him his two hundred dollars. He would be rich. He would take the train and go away off to a big city, and *she* would never be bothered with him again. Jerry would have to find someone else to lay his misdeeds onto. Wilmer had overslept. It was almost sun-up, and Mr. Henshaw had cautioned him to leave the barn before anyone was about. As quickly as possible, he let himself out into the alley, looking both ways before he emerged, to see that the coast was clear. He surely didn't want to get Mr. Henshaw into any trouble. He had left his suitcase at Pete Smith's.

When the bank opened, Wilmer was the first to

enter, and he went at once to Henshaw's private office as he had done several times before.

"You're on hand bright and early, I see, Wilmer, ready to get the money your little mother left for you, and start out to make your way in the world."

"You may be sure I would not forget to come to see you *this* morning. It has been ages since Daddy was married—very hard to wait."

"Where are you going, Wilmer?"

"I thought I should go to Cincinnati or maybe Chicago. I want to get clear away, so they can't find me."

"You'll have to be careful of your money, boy. I can give you only two hundred dollars, and that will have to last you a year. If you should use it all up and then have to come back home it would be pretty bad, wouldn't it?"

"I'll *never* come home."

"Well, a boy has to eat and sleep, and jobs are very hard to find. Your father will realize after a while that you have passed your fourteenth birthday, and he will guess I have paid you your money. He'll ask me where you have gone. I may not know the first time, but when you send for more money on your next birthday, I shall know. He could go and get you while you waited for me to send your money."

"What shall I do?"

"If you will agree to let me send your money in installments, once a month, when your father asks me, I will tell him you are all right, that I hear from you

every month, but that you do not want him to know where you are. What do you say?"

"That would be only sixteen and and two-thirds dollars a month. I couldn't go to Cincinnati and then live a month on that."

"No, you couldn't. Have you given up being a bridge-builder?"

"No, *sir*. I will not give that up—ever."

"Then you will have to go to school. Suppose you go to Clinton. It is only about a hundred miles. I will hand you your first month's money, and then drive you to Southmound, a few miles on your way. At Southmound, buy a ticket to La Due, which is a little this side of Clinton. Walk from La Due toward Clinton, trying all along to find a place where you can do some work and pay some money for your board while you go to school in Clinton. Don't fail to pray and trust in God. He will help you to find the right place. If you pay six or seven dollars a month for board and lodging and washing, and do chores to finish paying, that will leave you time enough for study, and you will still have money for your books and clothes. How does that sound?"

"Sounds all right, Mr. Henshaw. I'll do it. Will you give me my money now? Seems to me I have waited about as long as I possibly can to get my money and leave."

"Yes, here is a check for you to sign. Sign that and present it at the paying teller's window. He will give you the money. Here are some blank checks.

Fill out one every month and mail it to me. I will send you the sixteen sixty-seven when I receive your check. Do not go in debt, Wilmer. Pay for everything you buy when you buy it. Never smoke or drink. Never gamble. Pray, and read your Bible every day, and God will be a father and mother to you. When the teller has handed you your money, come back here to me with it, and I will help you decide how to carry it."

With his money safely stowed away, Wilmer hurried to Mrs. Smith's to pay her for the two days' meals, but she said he must allow her to give him the meals because of the good he had done to Pete.

"I am so thankful that I don't know what to do," she said, "for the change you have made in Pete. If you should ever need a place to stay all night, come right here. I'll fix you up a big lunch for noon today. I hope you will find a nice place to live, where there is a good woman to take care of you. I am so sorry for you. Pete has told me how your father and stepmother treat you, poor boy."

According to his arrangement with Henshaw, Wilmer walked out to the place where, months before, Henshaw had let him out of his car on the side road by the fringe of woods bordering the river. He didn't have long to wait until Henshaw's car stopped for him to get in. He was on his way at last, his precious mother's money in his pocket, his mother's good, lifelong friend by his side, a fine day to leave on, and

at least Mr. Henshaw, Carrie, Pete, and Mrs. Smith to think of as friends. He was sad and glad.

At half-past one he left the train at La Due. As he followed the disappearing train, walking along the highway, he wondered how he was going to find a place where he could live and go to school. When he had walked a short distance, he recalled what Henshaw had advised him—to pray. He left the highway and found a secluded place at the foot of a hickory with shaggy bark. Here he kneeled to thank God for Mr. Henshaw, for his mother's money, for being free from his stepmother's accusations, and for showing him where to find a place to live. He was going to ask God to show him the right place, and he believed God would do it, so he wisely decided to thank God for it beforehand.

As he proceeded along the highway, he looked carefully at the houses, and every time he passed a home he said, "Father, is that the one?" He believed God would make him feel like stopping when he came to the right one, so when he didn't feel that way he didn't stop. He was getting tired when he came at length to a home that looked good. He felt like going in. It was a white cottage. A smiling woman stood at the front door. There was a silo and a big red barn.

"I am Wilmer Coltrane," he faltered as he drew near to the woman who had stepped out onto the porch. "My stepmother said she didn't want me around any longer, so I left. I want to find a place where I can live and go to school. I can pay six or seven dollars

a month and do chores for the balance. I asked God to show me which house to stop at, and I didn't feel like stopping anywhere until I saw you."

"Where do you live, Wilmer?" the woman inquired.

"I haven't any place to live. I have left my stepmother's home. If you don't mind, I would rather not tell you where they live. Daddy might change his mind and make me come back."

When Wilmer had been gone from Parsons a month, Henshaw received a letter from him that read: "I still have enough of the money you gave me to last me another month. I am working for my board until school begins. I prayed about where to stop, as you told me, and the first place I felt like stopping at was Mr. Kesterson's. Mrs. Kesterson's children are gone. She treats me fine. I carried water to the men when they were threshing, and Mr. Kesterson let me ride to Clinton when he hauled off the oats. I had a lot of fun teaching the calf to drink. I didn't tell Mrs. Kesterson where I came from until I had been here quite a while. It would be awful if Daddy should find out where I am and come after me, but I am sure now that Mr. Kesterson will not tell where I am. When you write to me, address the letter to Mr. John Kesterson, Clinton, Mo."

CHAPTER FOUR

AFTER his second marriage, the wonderful times George Coltrane had had with his first wife, Marcia, was his almost constant meditation. He planned and worried almost day and night trying to hit upon some way to induce Elizabeth to respond to his caresses as affectionately and spontaneously as Marcia had done.

A few days after Wilmer's departure, as Coltrane was leaving for his day's work, the mist cast about him by his frenzied love-making lifted slightly, and he suddenly realized that he hadn't seen Wilmer at the breakfast table. He couldn't recall when he *had* seen the boy.

"Where is Wilmer, Bessie, sweetheart?" he inquired anxiously. "Seems to me I have not seen him for several days."

"He hasn't been here since you scolded him for the bad way he had been treating me and Jerry. We have had a peaceful week. I hope he *never* comes back."

Coltrane felt vaguely that Wilmer was being mistreated, but he was so engrossed with making love to his wife that Wilmer's whereabouts didn't impress him as being very important. He couldn't afford to risk

angering Elizabeth by saying he was sorry the boy was gone. However, he was not so insensible to his son's need and of his own duty as to agree with her harsh words. He merely said, "I suppose it couldn't be helped. Good-by, Precious. I will hurry home as soon as the whistle blows."

During the morning, Coltrane thought a good many times about Wilmer. He wondered how he had become such a bad boy so soon, when he had been so good all his life. Maybe as he got older the hidden meanness in him was coming out. Then he recalled that Wilmer's fourteenth birthday had passed, the time when Marcia had instructed Henshaw to begin paying him his annuity. Likely the boy had remembered it, drawn his money, and taken a trip. Probably he would spend the two hundred dollars in a short time and be back.

A month of ardent love-making with his wife passed, during which he thought only occasionally about Wilmer. He was floating about in a fool's elysium, half unconscious of the realities of life, hoping he could yet have in Elizabeth a wife as loving as Marcia had been. But when one day the sheriff spoke to him about Jerry, he opened his eyes and began to see things.

"Coltrane," the sheriff warned, "you had better keep a stricter eye on that boy of Mrs. Coltrane's. He will be in the lockup before long if you don't do something with him."

"Is Jerry a bad boy?" fluttered Coltrane. "What

has he been doing? Just childish pranks, I suppose."

"You may call it what you please, Coltrane," growled the sheriff, "but if a boy of mine hung around pool halls every night and was always with boys who are in and out of jail for petty thievery, I should do something about it. He may cost you a piece of money just any time."

Coltrane thanked the sheriff and went thoughtfully on his way. He recalled that two dimes had been missing, and with a sickening sensation, he recollected that at the time he, Wilmer's protector, had been so engrossed with plans for intensifying Elizabeth's love that he had not realized a serious situation had developed. He had simply fallen in with his wife's ideas and had punished Wilmer. Maybe Wilmer had not been guilty. He would write to Wilmer and ask him about it. Calling at the bank, he asked Mr. Henshaw if he knew where Wilmer was, saying the boy had run away.

"Yes, Coltrane, I know where he is, but he doesn't want *you* to know. He feels he has not had a fair deal since you married again. If you will pardon me for saying so, I feel the same way. I have known you and Marcia ever since she was born, and I have thought very highly of you both, especially of her. She was one of the salt of the earth. Naturally I have kept my eyes open, watching over Wilmer. When you were married to the mother of Jerry McTavish I felt sure Wilmer would have a bad time, so I have given him especial attention ever since."

"What is the matter with Jerry?" quaked Coltrane, licking dry lips. He was becoming increasingly fearful that he had guiltily failed his boy in a crucial experience in the boy's life.

"Oh, nothing much," scoffed the banker. "Only he is a liar and a cheat and a thief. He is very smart, and his mother, as mothers will, believes the lies he so skilfully spins for her."

"You astonish me, Henshaw! Seems strange you should know this about Jerry, while I have been supposing him a good boy."

"Oh, that is not strange. I have had my eyes opened. I have not been having a second wife who would not respond to my caresses as well as a former one did, so my mind has not been engrossed in love-making. If you will pardon me for saying it to you so bluntly, Coltrane, you have been asleep at the switch. Wilmer has been in desperate need of someone to stand up for him against the combined attacks of his stepmother and her son, but you have been so busy that you have not observed his need. You have even joined hands with his detractors and believed the lies being told on him. You went further than the most corrupt judge I have ever known would care to go, and that is saying quite a mouthful. Any judge, even the most corrupt, will *listen* to an accused person and at least allow him to make his plea. You refused to do that. When your boy tried to explain to you, you shut him up and sent him to bed. He told me about it, and I believe what he said.

"I am giving it to you straight, Coltrane, in the hope that I can jar you awake. However, it is too late for you to do anything for Wilmer. God may forgive you for what you have done, but the evil results of your misdeeds will stand. You have sown to the wind and you are bound to reap the whirlwind."

"Henshaw, you are saying terrible things to me. I ought to feel like killing you. But for some reason I don't. I suppose it is because I am afraid what you say is true."

As it is with sleeping dogs when they are aroused, so it was with George Coltrane. There was no moment of half consciousness when he awoke. Henshaw's broadside jarred him tremendously. He accepted as all his own the blame for Wilmer's present homeless condition. Because he didn't see any way he could have Wilmer at home again, he didn't press Henshaw to learn of the boy's whereabouts. For days after his talk with Henshaw, as Coltrane went over in his mind the many times he had taken sides against Wilmer when Elizabeth or Jerry had accused him, flashes of shame ran over him. George Coltrane was awake.

After his wife had gone to bed one night, Coltrane sat pondering over his situation. He thought about what the sheriff had said and wondered how soon Jerry would get into something that would prove expensive. He wondered about Wilmer, how he was getting along and whether he had a good place to stay. He knew the boy would have only two hundred dollars to meet his necessities for the entire year. Would he be wise

enough to make that amount last him? Or would he be reduced to beggary? He looked at his watch. It was eleven, too late for a fourteen-year-old boy to be out. He went to Jerry's room. It was empty. He would wait until Jerry came in. The twelve o'clock whistle blew, and then Jerry arrived.

"Where have you been so late, Jerry?" Coltrane inquired kindly.

"What business is it of yours where I've been? Do you think I have to be spied on like Wilmer?"

"I can see you have been drinking, Jerry, but I don't think you are too drunk to tell me where you have been. Where *have* you spent the evening?"

"Oh, shut up. I don't have to account to you."

"George," responded Mrs. Coltrane, aroused from her sleep by the sound of voices, "are you saying something to make Jerry feel bad?"

"It *seems* to make him feel bad. I asked him where he has been until after midnight, and it seems to make him feel very bad indeed."

"It will be far better for me to make such inquiries of Jerry, George. Go on to your room, Sweetheart. If you want to tell Mother about it in the morning, it will be all right."

When Jerry had gone swiftly from the room she asked, "Why were you bothering my boy with your questions, George?"

"Is it not my duty to make the money we need and to look out to see that we do not lose it after it *is* made? Answer me that."

"I suppose it is, but what has that to do with my question?"

"The sheriff told me that if I did not restrain Jerry he would have him in jail, and that no doubt would cost me a lot of money. In my job of taking care of our money, I have to see that Jerry doesn't make me spend a lot of it."

"And you believed what that old sheriff said about Jerry! How could you be so silly, George? I thought we had it settled that the bad things that have been done had been done by Wilmer."

"I was talking with Mr. Henshaw, the banker, and he also warned me about Jerry. He said Jerry is a cheat, a thief, and a liar. You may recall that that is something like Wilmer said that day you accused him of taking two dimes out of your purse."

"I have always thought highly of Mr. Henshaw. I have supposed he was a fair-minded man. What can have possessed him to begin telling lies about my boy? And you believed him!"

"I felt that it challenged me to investigate, for it was my business to watch over Jerry. If he is being led astray it is my business both for my own sake and yours as well as his to try to stop him. So I waited to see when he would come in and to ask him where he had been."

"Well, I suppose your intentions were good. I have found you a reasonable man; but surely you can see it naturally would irritate Jerry for *you* to ask him

such a question. If you had told me to ask him it would have been far better."

Coltrane had striven too long and too hard to increase Elizabeth's affection for him to carelessly throw away the results of his efforts unnecessarily, so he let the matter drop. The next night Jerry was absent again, and Coltrane said to his wife, "Did you find where Jerry was so late last night?"

"Oh, yes, I asked him this morning, and he told me all about it. Pete Smith has played hooky from school so much that he is now in classes with children younger than he is, and he is striving to get ahead as rapidly as possible. He asked Jerry to help him with his advanced studies. He wants to make two grades this year if he can. I was glad to find Jerry had not been into any mischief."

"That sounds all right," Coltrane replied. "Pete is awake at last, it seems. I am glad. He is not the only sleeper who has awakened, either."

"What do you mean, George?"

"Possibly I will tell you sometime but not tonight. Go on to bed when you get ready. You see how late it is, and Jerry is not here yet. I have some thinking to do, and it may be some time before I am ready to lie down."

Much mystified at the change in her husband, the lady presently retired to her room. When all was quiet, Coltrane got down the atlas of the world and began to look at the map of the Rocky Mountain States. He

had decided to leave, but he had not the remotest idea where he would go.

Finally he decided he must take a blind chance, for he had nothing by which to guide himself. Closing his eyes, he put his finger on the map to determine the State. Opening his eyes, he saw his finger resting on the State of Wyoming. He would go to the capital of the State. What was that? Yes, there it was in capitals, *Cheyenne*. He would go to Cheyenne, change his name, and make a new start.

The next day he found by inquiring at the bank that he still had twenty-two hundred dollars of the money Marcia had left him. He felt much elated to discover he had been able to get along these years without depleting the amount any more than he had. He stopped into Mr. Henshaw's office.

"Henshaw," he said, "you woke me up that day when you told me about Jerry. I *had* been asleep. I see now that all the terrible things you said about me are true. I have tried to talk reasonably to my wife, but she is as blind as a bat to Jerry's faults, and in fact she has made up her mind to believe nothing that is said against him."

"That is the regulation way for a mother to do, George. You must not complain about that."

"Well, I suppose not, Henshaw, but it makes it impossible for me to do any good trying to keep Jerry out of trouble, and life with his mother has lost all its charm now that I realize what I have done to Wilmer. I am leaving on the eleven o'clock train tonight."

"Leaving, George! Where are you going?"

"That is going to be kept a dark secret. I am going to take a new name, get a new job, and begin all over again. I am going to draw out my money and deposit two hundred dollars of it for Elizabeth. She will have the home and the furniture, and if Jerry is any account she and he, with two hundred dollars to start with, can get along. Responsibility may be the thing Jerry needs."

"Well, maybe so. He will get a major dose of it without warning. Are you going to tell your wife?"

"I shall tell her I am tired of my job. I am tired to the bone. I shall tell her I am leaving on the night train to try to find a job that will suit me better and that she can look for me when she sees me. I shall tell her that if she gets out of money, you have some left here for her. When she comes you may tell her if you care to that I shall not be back."

Coltrane purchased a ticket to Fort Scott, intending to change cars there and buy his ticket to Cheyenne. He thought craftily that if his wife should ask the agent where he bought his ticket to, she would learn nothing.

At home that evening, he said, "Well, wife, I gave up my job today. I am tired of everlastingly doing the same thing again and again. I am leaving on the train tonight to look for another location and a job that will suit me better."

"Sounds as if your usual good sense had momentarily departed from you, George. Why didn't you take a lay-off, so that if you didn't find anything suitable you could begin here again?"

"I'm fed up. Not going to work at that job any more. Burned my bridges. If you run low on money before I get back, see Henshaw. I have left some money with him for you."

"All right, George. I hate to go to Henshaw for anything after his saying those awful, false things about little Jerry, but I suppose I can do it. Maybe you will be back before I have to have money. Our credit is good, and I suppose I can make the little I have in my purse do for a month. I hope you will find something to do that you will like. I have often been sorry to see you having to work at an onerous task."

She helped him to pack his clothes and kissed him a tearful good-by at the door. She loved him. Now that Wilmer was out of the way, while she was annoyed and slightly distressed by the lies that were being told about Jerry, she didn't see any reason why she and George might not live long and happily together. She wouldn't mind moving to some other place. She would *like* to get where people would not concoct bad stories about Jerry.

Coltrane had never worked at anything that did not bore him. His active, inventive brain was always planning better ways to do things, but he had no outlet for his plans. To stand all day long and operate a resaw grew tiresome.

Walking from the hotel in Cheyenne where he had registered as "George Fullerton," taking the name of his former wife, Marcia's, father, he began to look for

a job. He would take plenty of time. He didn't have to hurry. Presently he saw a sign that read, "Fix it." Looking in, he watched an old man slowly moving about in the midst of broken chairs, decrepit bicycles, broken stoves, broken everything, it seemed to Coltrane, no, Fullerton (he must remember that was his name). Gazing fixedly through the window, Fullerton felt a decided urge to be engaged at that kind of work. Every job would be something different. He could have pleasant employment and be constantly planning new and better ways. If the old man didn't want to hire a helper, possibly he would sell an interest in the business and take a partner.

"Want to hire a competent helper?" Fullerton inquired.

"No, nothing like that," the old man replied. "I need one, but I haven't the money. I turn away more work than I can do, but I am feeble and afraid to obligate myself to pay a helper."

"Would you sell me a half interest in the business and let me do the bulk of the work? I could pay a reasonable price in cash."

"That sounds a whole lot better," beamed the old man. "My name is Jones; what is yours?"

"They call me George Fullerton at the hotel where I stop."

So it came about that a noticeable, big new sign was put up. It read:

"LET
JONES & FULLERTON
FIX IT"

CHAPTER FIVE

"NOW I want it understood abs'lutely that you guys are never to come around where I live. My mother doesn't know I ever even speak to such fellows as you, and she *mustn't* know."

Jerry McTavish was laying down the law to Snipe and Catface, his preferred companions among all the hoodlums he knew. No doubt they had real names, but all Jerry had ever heard them called was "Snipe" and "Catface." They called him "Custard" because he could look so harmless and innocent when being accused of anything. "Just like a custard pie," Snipe had said.

"Mother and I live with my stepdad," Jerry continued, "an' if he should get wise to my running with such trash as you fellows, he might throw me out, and then where'd we be? I shouldn't have any more money, an' we'd have to steal *all* our cigarettes."

"That wouldn't be so bad, Custard," grinned Snipe. "It gives a fellow a thrill to slip through a broken window or down through a skylight into a dark store."

"Custard's never tried it," mocked Catface. "He always stands on the sidewalk outside while we go in and get the stuff. He's so respectable it's always up to

him to keep watch. If anyone saw Snipe or me watchin', they'd likely suspicion somethin' an' wonder what we's up to. We'd have to move on. But they know Custard's all right an' wouldn't give his bein' where he was another thought."

"Well, that makes one more reason why you guys are to stay away from my home. If you ever want me, just wait 'ntil I come down town," Jerry directed.

At the time when Coltrane was stepping aboard the train for Fort Scott, Jerry was watching across the street from Bailey's grocery, while Snipe and Catface prowled about in the store looking for cigarettes and any other loot they could use, when a policeman came along. Jerry had a shingle in his hand, and with this pressed against the picket fence as he walked idly along he gave the prearranged warning signal.

"You had better get along home, Jerry," the policeman said. "I see you loafing around town at a late hour too much."

"Alright," Jerry smiled, remembering that he was to play the role of the innocent child. "I will go right in. I just like to wander about by myself in the night. It isn't pleasant around home with a stepdad, 'y understand. But I will run along now, and I thank you for your interest."

When Jerry finally entered his home, it was after midnight. Mrs. Coltrane had not yet been able to get calm enough to go to sleep after hearing the announcement of her husband's having quit his job and learning that he was leaving the city to find another location.

When she heard Jerry coming in, she wondered what time it was and switched on the light. After twelve o'clock—too late for Jerry to be out! Other people might begin to believe the vile things being said about him. She must have a talk with him and explain these things to him. Maybe his keeping such late hours was the reason the stories had got started. Strange, though, that as level-headed a man as Albert Henshaw should listen to such foolishness. Probably the sheriff was to blame. George would be gone now for a while and she would have more time to give to Jerry. George was so exacting. He wanted her to treat him as if they were young folk on their first bridal tour. It would be a rest to have George gone awhile. Good old George! He *was* good. He worked steadily and brought home all his money. He never went out nights—but he was so funny about the way he expected her to treat him. She had tried, like the faithful wife she intended to be, to live up to his expectations, but it would be a welcome rest to have him away for a week or so.

The next morning Mrs. Coltrane was in the kitchen keeping as quiet as she could so she would not wake Jerry. He must be allowed to sleep as long as possible and still have time to get to school. Answering a knock at the door, she faced the sheriff.

"Good morning, Mr. Majors," she quavered; "it is a fine morning."

"Good morning, ma'am. I'd like to see Jerry, if you please."

"He is not here this morning, Mr. Majors. He went

out with some of his friends last night, saying he might not be at home until morning, and for me not to worry. I am looking for him any minute now. What shall I tell him you wanted with him, Mr. Majors?"

"Bailey's grocery was robbed last night, Mrs. Coltrane. We got two of the young villains, Snipe and Catface, but Jerry slipped through our fingers. He was the lookout."

When the sheriff had taken his departure, Jerry appeared at once. He had overheard the conversation. It was a low-down shame the way that old fool kept pestering him. If he were only bigger he would take it out of his fool hide. When a boy does try hard to do good, stays up half the night helping a boy get his lessons in advance, its tough to be accused of being in cahoots with such rats as Snipe and Catface, just because he is seen walking quietly along home at a late hour. Sure, he knew the fellows. They used to go to school. Mrs. Smith would tell the old sheriff how he and Pete worked until almost twelve getting Pete up on his algebra.

Mrs. Coltrane felt the need of her husband. This was the most serious thing that had ever happened in her life. She wondered whether the neighbors saw the sheriff at her door. She was glad it was so early. Maybe they would think he was inquiring after George, to ask him something.

"Your breakfast is waiting for you, Jerry, precious boy. The mean old sheriff can't pin anything like that on Mamma's boy. We will go over and get Pete and

Mrs. Smith and have them tell the sheriff where you were all last night."

With that she remembered having told the sheriff that Jerry had not come home. Awkward! Wonder why I told him that lie? It made me so provoked to think he was here asking for Jerry, after what I heard he had been saying about the child. If we take Pete and Mrs. Smith up to tell the sheriff that Jerry was at the Smith home until almost midnight, he will see that that doesn't match with what I told him at the door. Oh, dear! I wish George were here.

"Jerry, I lied to the sheriff. You heard me. The Lord forgive me. I don't know what to do now. How can we get Mrs. Smith and Pete to tell the sheriff the truth? Your being at the Smith's until almost twelve and then starting home will not agree with what I told the sheriff."

"You ought not to've lied, Ma. Why didn't you call *me*? I could a took the sheriff over to Pete's an' had it all explained in no time. Now it sure *is* a mess. If women would only tell the truth!"

Jerry started off to school. "Don't worry, Ma. It'll all come out in the wash. We may have to tell the sheriff you were scared an' told a fib, but that won't be so bad. Lots of mothers lie for their kids. *He* knows that. So long, Ma."

The moment Jerry was out of sight of his home he turned quickly into an alley leading to the railroad yards. Walking idly and slowly among the tracks, by watching his chance, he slipped into a box car without

being seen. The car was empty, but it had been loaded with hay. When the train was well out of town, Jerry gathered the hay with which the car was strewn into one corner and made a bed on which he finished his abbreviated night's rest.

When the sheriff returned, Mrs. Coltrane had decided what she must do. Jerry must not be made to suffer because of her sin. She would tell the sheriff, and he could go and see Mrs. Smith and satisfy himself that Jerry had been all right even if his mother had been so wicked.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Majors," she apologized, "Jerry was here when you called before. I lied to you. I am his mother, and your being the sheriff frightened me so I didn't know what I was doing. He was upstairs. I didn't know where he had been last night, and I was afraid for him. He has gone to school now. He told me all about where he had been last night when he came downstairs after you left. He was over at Pete Smith's. Go and ask Mrs. Smith if Jerry wasn't there last night until almost twelve. No, sir, Pete hasn't been here this morning. Pete is a lot better boy than he used to be."

So this heroic mother bared her sinful soul to the sheriff and with calm assurance sent him to satisfy himself by talking with Mrs. Smith. When the sheriff came back and reported that Mrs. Smith declared she hadn't seen Jerry in she didn't know when, that he had never been at her home at any time to help Pete

or for any other reason, Mrs. Coltrane was in desperation.

Why didn't the sheriff go to the school and talk with Jerry himself and get the real truth about the whole matter? He *had* been at the school! Jerry wasn't there? Had not been there at all this morning? Why, how could that be? Jerry had left for school in plenty of time so he wouldn't be tardy. Much annoyed, the sheriff took his leave.

Where was Jerry? Frightened away from his own mother and the only home he had! Poor, poor boy! It was all the fault of that wicked, lying, stealing Wilmer. If Jerry had—but of course he hadn't. But if Jerry would ever have thought of going wrong, it would be because of Wilmer's evil influence over him. Wilmer was older than Jerry.

The day dragged by. Night came at last, but it brought no sleep to Mrs. Coltrane. She walked the floor. She tried to read. She even kneeled and tried to pray, but it didn't occur to her to undress and go to bed.

In the morning she decided to order some meat and have a nice meal ready for Jerry. He would surely be in by noon. She took down the phone and made the order.

"What say?" What could be the matter with Mr. Bailey? "You want the groceries paid for when they are delivered, you say? I am surprised, Mr. Bailey. Mr. Coltrane is out of town, and I have not had time to go to the bank to get money. Just cancel the order. I do not need anything from your store."

Was the world coming to an end? Husband quitting his job and leaving town in such a queer state of mind. Jerry accused of robbery, and she herself betrayed into a bare-faced lie. Now Jerry gone, and to cap it all, Mr. Bailey, their old, tried grocery friend, was afraid of his little bill. Twenty-one dollars. That was the amount Mr. Bailey had mentioned. He wanted the twenty-one dollars she already owed him.

"The old skinflint! I just hate everybody. They are all conspiring against a woman. Maybe George is not coming back. Be just like the other crazy things that are happening."

Putting on her street clothes, she went to the bank. "Mr. Henshaw," she explained, "Mr. Coltrane has gone away to find another location. Before he went, he told me he had left some money here for me."

"Yes, Mrs. Coltrane, he did. Sign your name on this card so we shall have your signature, and then you can go to writing checks. There is two hundred dollars to your credit here."

The banker intended to be perfectly fair with this woman who had made Wilmer's life such a burden that he had to leave home, but Henshaw did not feel called upon to give her any advice or offer any further information unless she asked for it.

Drawing out twenty-five dollars, Mrs. Coltrane went to Bailey's store, where she paid her bill. She stopped at another store to make her purchases for dinner. But Jerry didn't come for dinner or for supper, although the good food left from dinner was prepared again in

appetizing form for supper. Two weeks of weary waiting passed and the lonely woman was filled with impotent rage at the heartless way everyone who ought to sympathize with her was treating her. Wilmer, she felt, was the chief of her tormentors. If he hadn't been what he was, she felt sure that everything would have been all right. Finally she took again the position she had occupied when she had married Coltrane.

Many times an argument would spring up, seemingly within her, as if there were two of her. One would say, maybe Wilmer *was* a good boy, maybe he *didn't* take those dimes. *Carrie* was sure he didn't. Never knew of Carrie's telling a lie. Carrie was black, but she was good. Then the other would answer back sharply, Wilmer *must* have taken those dimes. Your boy couldn't do a thing like that, and from his own mother. Absurd! Then the other would say the sheriff told George that Jerry was going wild. The reply would come that he didn't tell anything in particular that Jerry had done, just generalized. He merely had suspicions. Then on the other side, Mr. Henshaw said Jerry was bad. Then, no doubt it was the sheriff made Henshaw think that. Why, Jerry is my *boy;* if a boy's mother doesn't believe in him and stand up for him, who will? If he has—of course he didn't—but if anyone thinks Jerry has been into meanness, it is because bad boys have led him off.

So the battle in the woman's soul would rage, but the end would always be that a mother must stand up

for her child. If a mother does not stand up for her child, who will? She would like to know that.

She became sour, and when she spoke, her words were so ungracious and her voice was so sharp and her countenance looked so forbidding that her friends became fewer and fewer. Elizabeth Coltrane was reaping the crop for which she had spent her time in sowing the seed since her marriage to George Coltrane. She felt sorry for herself, but it did not once occur to her that she herself might be to blame for all the evil that had come upon her. Much less did she think of its being her fault that George and Wilmer were homeless wanderers upon the earth. They were the guilty ones, especially Wilmer, and she the victim.

After the check for twenty-five dollars had been cashed, Henshaw wrote to Wilmer:

"Dear Wilmer:

"Your stepmother was just in the bank. She said your father had gone away to look for another location, telling her he had left some money with me for her. I knew this, of course, but I let her tell me without my saying anything. She thinks her husband will find work in some place where she and he and Jerry can live.

"But your father told me he was leaving for good. He said he was going to find a new home, change his name, and start all over again. Knowing that all the trouble in your father's home has resulted from her attitude toward you in times of differences between you and Jerry, I didn't feel too much respect for her

when she called at the bank, so I didn't tell her anything she didn't ask me about. She said Bailey had asked her to pay up her grocery bill. She was peeved and astonished at this, but she didn't need to have been if she had recollected that Jerry is said to have been the outside member of the gang of hoodlums who robbed Bailey's store.

"The officers caught Snipe and Catface, but Jerry got away. The sheriff called at Jerry's home the next morning and Mrs. Coltrane told him Jerry wasn't there, when in fact he was upstairs, as she knew. Later she confessed to the sheriff she had lied to him. Bitter dose for a fine lady to swallow, but a woman will go all lengths for her child. No doubt she believed what Jerry told her. She *would*, being his mother.

"Your father would be glad to be reconciled to you. It would be fine for you to write to him, if you had his address. He is a good man, and now that he has gotten awake, he feels as guilty as a sheep-killing dog over the way he treated you. Your father loves you and would go to you if he knew where to go. He didn't tell me where *he* was going.

"Don't forget, Wilmer, that human fathers sometimes get mistaken and forget their boys, but your heavenly Father never does. Don't hold any grudge against your father. He made a fearful mistake in the way he treated you, but if he had it all to do over again, with his present light, he would act very differently.

"For that matter, you must not permit yourself to hold any grudge against your stepmother. She mis-

treated you, I know, but she felt she had to do it to stand up for her own boy. She felt that, being his mother, she *had* to do that. It was wrong, and she is being made to suffer greatly. Just wish her well and leave her to God. He will attend to her. Leave both her and Jerry with God and ask Him to do the best He can for them. God has said, 'Vengeance is mine: I will repay.'

"Your old friend,
"Albert Henshaw

"P.S. I am delighted to see that you are allowing your money to pile up here. It is always a good thing to have money laid by. You never know when you are going to need it, and need it badly."

CHAPTER SIX

TWO YEARS after Wilmer had left home, he saw a girl. Ethel Fulbright was not the first girl he had seen, but Ethel was different. Other girls had been in his classes. He had met still others at Sunday-school, but they were mere schoolmates, something like boys, but not so satisfactory to be with. But when at mid-term in his last year at high school this haughty, flaxen-haired marvel of loveliness flashed into view, he was stirred. The teacher announced that Mr. and Mrs. Fulbright had just moved into town and that Ethel had joined the graduating class.

Ethel was a few weeks younger than Wilmer, as he discovered in his first talk with her and, as she was the first person younger than he who had ever been a classmate of his, this fact made a deep impression. Evidently Ethel was very smart as well as stunningly pretty. Wilmer did not analyze her beauty to see of what it consisted, but he knew that when he caught her eye, it gave him a sensation all inside that was different from any feeling he had ever had before. Moreover, he was afraid of her. He felt insignificant in her sight, and to address her called for the exercising of considerable bravery.

But Wilmer's long training in the severe school of hard knocks had been too thorough to allow infatuation for a girl to keep him from making his usual excellent grades. At the end of the first month after Ethel had joined the class, when he received his grade card it showed an average of nine and seven-tenths—almost perfect. Would Ethel let him see hers? How did she do it? Nine and *eight*-tenths! Strange! The first classmate of his who had ever received a grade as high as his own. Ethel hadn't studied, either. She had spent much of her time in writing notes and shooting paperwads, while he had been hard at work.

"Wonderful, Ethel! How did you do it?"

"Oh, that's nothing. I always get the highest grade in my classes. It is easy for me to learn. You are very smart Wilmer, to get nine and seven-tenths. I never have known a boy before who could do that."

Wilmer was intoxicated. Ethel Fulbright was talking to him as though she liked him. She was a wonderful girl, distractingly beautiful, and at the same time smart. Her figure was one of charming loveliness, trim and athletic; her happy-looking face and her very fine light brown hair were the most beautiful he had ever seen, and such a mind! He knew his own brain was better than that of any student he had met before, but he had to work hard to make his excellent grades, while Ethel never took her books home, never seemed to study in school hours, and often, he had heard, was out very late at dances and other rollicking parties.

How did she do it? She was a wonder! True, in the

noon-hour, when everything in the schoolroom was in a turmoil and pandemonium reigned, Ethel sat with her eyes glued on her books, not seeming to know that anyone else was in the room, wholly absorbed in getting her lessons.

"What are you going to do when you are a man, Wilmer?" Ethel catechized one day a couple of weeks before the close of school. They were walking closer together than an observer might have considered really necessary.

"I am going to build great bridges," he said, and she noticed his eyes glowed and his whole face lighted up at the thought. "Ever since I can remember, it has been my purpose to be a builder of great bridges. I get the utmost pleasure out of merely sitting and gazing by the hour at such a bridge."

"How exciting! You are so different, Wilmer. None of the other boys I know seem to have any plans for the future. All they think of is running here and there, laughing, talking, and having a good time. You will have to have a lot of schooling before you will dare to undertake such an enterprise, I presume."

"Yes, I suppose it will take several years. But great achievements demand great efforts. I wrote yesterday to the Massachusetts School of Technology, asking them for a catalog and telling them what my life's ambition is. I am going to be a man who thoroughly knows his business."

"Surely, Wilmer, you are the smartest boy I have ever known."

"You are the only person, girl or boy, who ever made better grades than I in my classes. If I had to be beaten, I am glad you are the one to do it. You are so beautiful and so sweet that it doesn't hurt much to have you beat me."

"My, Wilmer! What a fine speech that was. I thank you."

"What are you going to do, Ethel, when you are a woman? But you are a woman now, aren't you?"

"Oh, girls develop more quickly than boys, but I am still a girl. I, too, have had great thoughts and dreamed big dreams. I am going to be a Certified Public Accountant. To day-dream about sitting in the office of some great factory or publishing house or manufacturing establishment, laying out for them a method of cost accounting, getting a system of bookkeeping especially adapted to their needs installed and in fine working order, gives me something like the same feeling I suppose, that you speak of having when you look at a big bridge."

"Remarkable! Ethel, you astonish me. I thought girls laid their plans to get married."

"Even if I were doing that, it would be folly for me to grow to womanhood without so equipping myself that if it became necessary I could be comfortably independent. Maybe the only chance I shall have to get married will be with someone having low ideals. I had better go on alone than marry anyone as treacherous and selfish as the best one of the young men I know."

"I have *high* ideals, Ethel."

"Oh, I didn't mean you, Wilmer. You were not in mind when I spoke of young men. You are a boy. I think, when you grow up, you will not be like the young men I know."

"I will not, and I am going to ask you to marry me when I have completed my education and have a good job. I feel sure I shall never love anyone but you. You are so sweet!"

"Wilmer! I didn't think of your saying that, but it sounded good. It sounded better than anything I have ever heard you say before."

"I hope it will still sound good when I come for you."

"I believe it will. I intend that it shall. I think you are the finest boy I have ever known, and when you get to be a man I just know you will be unselfish and honorable."

"Keep your lips clean of others' kisses until I come to claim the right to them. Will you, Ethel? I will do the same for you."

The boy and girl had stopped on the sidewalk facing each other and feeling very serious and grown-up as they talked.

"I promise, Wilmer. No boy has kissed me yet."

"I have never kissed a girl. I never have seen one I felt like kissing. You are the first real girl I have ever seen."

When Wilmer received the school catalog, he got a letter from the director of admissions advising him that the course that would probably be best adapted to his

needs would be the one entitling him to the degree of Bachelor of Science in civil engineering.

The catalog astonished Wilmer by its size and the bewildering number of courses it described. It contained two hundred and twenty-four large pages, and the index showed that the school taught hundreds of different subjects. He hadn't dreamed before that there could be so much to learn. Taking the catalog to the professor in whose classes he had graduated from high school, and confiding to him his life's ambition, together they decided he must have three years in the academy before applying for matriculation in the school of technology.

When Ethel Fulbright arrived at the university, she knew definitely what she intended to do before she allowed herself to listen to the wooings of any man. Wilmer was just a boy, and he would probably forget all about her and his boyhood promises. Whether he did or did not, she would complete all necessary preliminary studies and take the special training and examinations looking toward a C.P.A. degree.

As Wilmer's second year in the academy was drawing to a close, two letters came, one from Ethel and the other from Mr. Henshaw.

Wonder what Ethel has to say! Queer how a boy will talk and act when afflicted with puppy love as he had been. These hard-boiled sophisticated fellows in the academy knew so much more than he did about such things as that. His love for Ethel had seemed very real and sweet, but from the way the boys talked, it

was not. The love boys have is puppy love. The real thing is very different and much better. It comes later on in life. His last letter to Ethel he had written a month or more after he had received hers, and now she had waited three months—it must be that long—before answering. He would open Mr. Henshaw's letter first.

"My very dear Boy:

"Your fine letter came to hand a day or so ago. So glad always to receive your letters. I congratulate you on the faithfulness you have shown in preparing to realize your life's ambition.

"I feel disturbed lest I may have failed you. For a long time you have not written me anything about your prayer life. You were a good Christian boy. I encouraged you to pray, and you did so, with delightful results, as you recall. But I know the terrible strain and temptation to which students in our academies and colleges are subjected. Half-baked, self-styled scientists occupying professor's chairs, while they live in sin seek to corrupt the minds of their students. Instead of repenting and believing the gospel, they profess to disbelieve the Bible as the easiest way of escape from self-condemnation.

"I fear you have fallen under the influence of such men, and I am today filled with anxiety lest you have been driven away from your boyhood faith by the men under whom you have studied. I ought to have thought of this long ago and have written you freely about it.

"The finest of the great have believed implicitly in the truth of the Bible. Gladstone, Grant, Lincoln, Lee, nearly all of the Presidents believed the Bible. The great men who sit on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States believe it. The list could be greatly extended among the really great. Any man who is willing to forsake his sins and live a life devoted to God's service will believe the Bible.

"Possibly I am writing in this very serious way wholly without need; but when I realized how long it had been since I had read anything in your letters about the Bible I was distressed for fear you had been betrayed by your professors."

Dear Mr. Henshaw! What could he write to the old man? He could not tell him of the radically different views about religion that now dominated his thinking. He hadn't the heart to let the old man know that he had, intellectually at least, adopted the Nietzschean code of morals nor that he had become convinced that Nietzsche's statements about God and the Bible were true.

For a long time Wilmer sat, toying with Ethel's unopened letter, pondering gloomily over the vast change that had taken place in his attitude toward life. He recalled with a shrug the shock he had experienced when for the first time he had read Nietzsche's statement that "there is no heaven and no hell; fear, therefore, nothing anymore" and "Be not decoyed out of enjoying this life by the life eternal. I conjure you,

my brethren, remain true to the earth, and believe not those who speak unto you of super-earthly hopes."

But now these statements were only two of volumes having similar import and with which he had become so familiar that they seemed to be both natural and right.

The letter of his old friend, tried and true, made a deep impression on Wilmer. It set his mind to work in unaccustomed channels. The professors in the academy were *not* men who classed with those Mr. Henshaw mentioned. The professors were learned men, it is true, but mere drawers of comparatively small salaries. Gladstone and Lee and Grant and Lincoln, however, were giants.

Then his precious little mother — he had always thought of her since she had passed away as being in heaven. Like a blinding, painful flash he realized that if the Bible is not true he had no way of knowing where his mother was.

Unable to decide what to write to his old friend, he broke the seal of Ethel's letter:

"Dear Wilmer:

"I have just returned from a visit to Clinton. Suppose I shall not go again. Since I sloughed off the fossilized, archaic concepts about God and the Bible that were foisted upon me in my tender years, there seems to be nothing in common between me and Mother. She still believes in the out-of-date, antiquated old-style morality, and thinks I shall be lost, as she expresses it, unless I put my trust in Jesus and obey what He taught.

She even believes in hell. You can see that for me a visit in her home would be a total loss—a complete failure. She grieves over me heartbrokenly, and I am annoyed with her because of her Puritanic notions.

"The fact that so far I have lived my life without violating even her Victorian ideas of the proprieties doesn't seem to give her much solace. She says that feeling as I do, and looking at sin the way I do, my having lived uprightly as she calls it, is merely because I have never been really tempted.

"She may be right about that for none of the men I have met have been able to gain any influence over me. My experience is that human beings of the masculine gender are despicable. 'Present company,' you know, of course."

There was much more of the letter, and it had a surprising effect on Wilmer. Ethel suited him far better than any other girl he had ever seen. Of course he knew now that his tender feeling for her was not real love; but even so it had persisted with remarkable strength and durability for so transitory a thing as puppy love.

Because of the native uprightness of character that was his, he too had held himself strictly aloof from the orgies and escapades that his instructors deemed advisable or at least allowable for young people. He had not considered himself bound by his boyhood covenant with Ethel about his lips, yet, for some undetermined reason, when a charming co-ed had spoken ingratiatingly about a two-some party in his room, he

had always been conscious of those promises and, without assigning to himself any reason, he had consistently remained free from indulging in the liberties between the sexes held out by his instructors as innocent and natural.

It seemed to him that Ethel in her letter had given him to understand that she had adopted as the way to live the teachings of the new morality, even though thus far she had not had occasion to put that mode of life into actual practice. This disclosure jarred him to the center of his being.

Realizing that he was deeply stirred, he began to question with himself. If it is right and proper, and the way best calculated to bring happiness, to follow the teachings of the Nietzschean code, why did his soul start back in such horror from the mere thought of Ethel's taking that course? Why had he himself failed so completely in following Nietzsche's advice? Could it be, after all, that the faith of his darling little mother had been sound and real? that Mr. Henshaw was sane and wise in taking the position he did?

He hadn't been to church in a long, long time. Was it wise to cast aside the entire set of beliefs formerly held by him, and, too, about so tremendous a matter, without giving himself the opportunity to hear what could be said *against* his newly acquired ideas, if there were anything to be said? Perhaps it would be better, yes, wiser, to go and hear what some successful preacher had to say. There are two sides to almost anything.

People who hear only one side are likely to overlook the fact that there *is* another side.

Ten days after Wilmer received the letters from Ethel and Mr. Henshaw, he wrote to his stepmother:

"Dear Mother:

"I have been away from God for a long time. At school I was persuaded to believe that the Bible is not true, and this resulted in my losing the consciousness of God's presence that I had when I was a boy. But last night God, through His blessed Holy Spirit, removed my doubts, and today I am again happy in the Lord.

"I am telling you about it, Mother, because for years I have felt very unkindly toward you. Today I find my heart is changed. I feel that I love you. I humbly beg you to forgive me for hating you all these years. Believe me to be,

"Yours affectionately,

"Wilmer Coltrane"

With a feeling of deep satisfaction that he had been enabled to write such a letter with genuine honesty of heart, he wrote to his father:

"My dearest Father:

"I do not know the name you are going by now, neither do I know where you are. Mr. Henshaw knows, however, and I am asking him to forward this letter to you. I love you, Daddy. I could not possibly have said that yesterday. For years my love for you was dead—dead, as Swinburne says, 'as the dawn's gray

dew at high midnoon of the mounting day that mocks the might of the dawn it slew.' Not only had I lost all affection for you, my precious Father, but also, and that fact carries the explanation of the other, I had lost my love and my faith in the Savior.

"But all is different and new today. God has again revealed Himself to me. I knew Him in a childlike way years ago. Now I know Him as a man. Because I do, and because I owe you an apology for failing to honor you through my later growing years, I am writing this letter. Forgive me, Daddy. Can you? If you will let me know where you are and what name you bear, as soon as I can be relieved from other pressing duties I hope to come and see you.

"I am writing a letter of apology something like this to Mother and mailing it to her today. What a difference in one's feelings and outlook on life it does make to let the Savior in!

"Big new issues have come into my life that have a greater lure for me than even my lifelong desire to be a builder of great bridges.

"Your affectionate son,
"Wilmer"

Wilmer's next letter was to Mr. Henshaw:

"My very dear Mr. Henshaw:

"When I received your good letter I didn't know what to answer you. Your faithful inquiries about my spiritual condition and position found me far from God, a Modernist, prayerless, full of unbelief. I didn't

want to tell you these things knowing how it would grieve your loving heart. You have been so good to me all the years of my troubled life that I could not bring myself to hurt you. So I was waiting, wondering what I could write.

"Last night, however, the Lord, by a miracle of grace, wooed me back unto Himself. He did more, far more. I do not know what you will think, but I must tell you, He called me to be an evangelist, giving my life to getting men saved from their sins.

"I highly appreciate you, Mr. Henshaw. You have been wonderful to me, ever since I was a broken-hearted boy in my father's home.

"Lovingly yours,
"Wilmer"

Having written these letters, Wilmer decided to wait a day before writing to Ethel. Strange how important to him it seemed that he should say just the right thing to her. Strange, too, that for these years every time he had met a woman and had thought of cultivating her acquaintance, he had always almost immediately lost interest in her because she failed to measure up to the excellence he rememberd as being Ethel's.

The next morning when Wilmer awoke he knew he was a happy man. He had been miserable so long, and to be happy was an experience so novel that he fairly hugged himself with delight. The critical, hard feeling he had held for years toward his father and stepmother had been replaced by hearty Christian love. Possibly

he didn't think any more highly of them than he had before, but he wished them all manner of good so heartily that the bad things they had done dropped out of sight. As he thought about his stepmother, it occurred to him that she might not have as much money as she really needed. At any rate, it might assist her to get into a loving frame of mind if he sent her a present. He would do that at once. Mr. Henshaw had written that Wilmer's father had been in the habit of sending her an occasional twenty-five dollars. He would send her twenty-five dollars, too. He wanted to please her.

"Maybe," he thought, "if I am extra good to her, it will help when I try to lead her back to Christ."

Then he undertook the task that seemed to him so serious—writing a letter to Ethel.

"Dear Ethel:

"When I received your letter I thought I had fully accepted the Nietzschean code that you and I have been taught by our preceptors is the last word in modern-day truth. Nevertheless by some means I had been kept, as you also have been, from putting its precepts into actual practice. I believed Nietzsche but lived largely as though I believed the Nazarene. When I read of your mother's fears and saw that she had solid grounds for them, I was profoundly disturbed. I believed it would be right for you to live as we have been taught young people should live, but still there was something in me that cried out fiercely that it must not be.

"Finally I decided to go and hear some good preacher

and see if he would have anything to say in defense of the ideas by which my mother lived, and resting upon which she died in peace. I had not heard a sermon in many moons. The Lord used your letter to stir me up and thus made it a means of saving my soul when I had all but forfeited every claim to His mercy. At once I became interested in the service. I listened to the testimonies, the singing, and the sermon with a depth of interest that, when I thought about it, astonished me. I went night after night. The Spirit of God brought me under conviction of sin so crushing that it could not be endured. Finally I went to the front and yielded my life anew to Christ.

"Notwithstanding all my neglect of Him, my Lord came to me with such sweetness and so comforted and blessed me that, now that I am trying to tell you about it, I find there are no words capable of conveying the message. The Bible has become again my daily refuge and delight. The horrible Modernistic philosophy rampant at the academy I now see to be the sheerest nonsense.

"Do you not agree with me that that was a most remarkable result of your letter?

"But that is not all. In fact there is much besides. As I was on my knees fighting for my life against the massed powers of hell, which by my inexcusable unbelief and neglect of prayer and Bible reading I had given charge of my soul, I heard the voice of my Lord. In tones that thrilled my heart with their dulcet sweetness, He said, 'You are to be My evangelist.'

"There was so much unsurrendered self-will in me at that time that this announcement brought on great reasonings, and a wicked spirit of rebellion arose in me, for the time overpowering the desire I had felt so keenly to be saved from my sins. These words meant I must give up my lifelong ambition to be a builder of great bridges. This I felt I could not and would not do. But the Holy Spirit continued to convict me of sin and of judgment to come and of the necessity of righteousness. It seemed to me hell was opening her mouth and that any moment I might be plunged into her burning lake forever.

"After two days of fighting against God, His Spirit helped me to yield to Him my life. Peace that cannot be described or known unless felt came, and with it a sense of the deepest satisfaction, in that from this time on I was to be a laborer together with God in saving men. My calling now seems to me so much higher than that for which I had aspired all of my life before that I am glad without a regret for the change.

"I am telling you about it so much in detail because of a desire that seems to be strong in me to have you understand why I have changed my life purpose, and, too, I hope you may be aroused to consider anew your own foundations.

"As ever, yours,
"Wilmer"

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABOUT six months after George Coltrane left his wife with the purpose of starting life anew under a different name, Henshaw received a letter from George Fullerton enclosing a draft for twenty-five dollars. The letter explained that the money was to be placed to the credit of Elizabeth Coltrane and that she be notified that it had been sent to her by a stranger. When the money came, Henshaw notified Mrs. Coltrane, as Fullerton's letter had requested, and she came in and got the money.

When the banker informed her he had been told to tell her the money had been sent her by a stranger, she was greatly mystified but had a suspicion that it came from her husband. Through the years at irregular but frequent intervals other drafts for the same amount were received by Henshaw in the same way, with the same request. Whenever such a remittance came, Mrs. Coltrane came in to get the money, and in this way a degree of familiarity grew up between her and the banker.

A few days after Henshaw received the letter from Wilmer telling of his having been reinstated in divine favor and called to preach, Mrs. Coltrane came in to

receive one of these remittances. For a long time the banker had been meditating and praying over having a heart-to-heart talk with this woman. Now he believed the time had arrived.

"I had a letter a few days ago from Wilmer, Mrs. Coltrane," he began. "I have been thinking for years that some time I ought to speak to you about the way you appear to me and the way the public here generally views you. I believe the time has come for me to do so, and yet I do not wish to intrude. My feelings toward you are of the kindest, and I shall not say what I feel you should hear without your consent."

"I don't care to hear anything about Wilmer Coltrane," grated the woman. "He is the source of all my troubles. If it were not for the way he did, the peace of my home would never have been disturbed. But anything you feel like saying to me as to the way you and the community feel about me, I shall be glad to hear."

"The particular reason I feel that I should speak to you is that I think it is possible that even yet, if you would make proper advances you could get your husband back. George is a good man. As no doubt you have all along supposed, although you did not know it, it is he who has sent you these many hundreds of dollars, of which you have in your hands the last installment.

"George is a successful business man going by another name. He feels that you drove him and his boy away from home. After he at last got awake to the

way he had through your influence been treating his boy, he felt he could not remain any longer under the same roof with you, without seeming to side with you in your false notions about Wilmer, so he left. His fond hopes for a lovely home in which to spend his life and end his lays were wrecked. To this day he doesn't know where Wilmer is. He doesn't know but that Jerry is playing the man and caring for you. Still he keeps on sending you money. Pretty white of George Coltrane, I say."

"He is not the only one whose hopes for a lovely home have been wrecked," moaned Mrs. Coltrane, wiping a furtive tear.

"I must be very, very plain with you, Mrs. Coltrane, if I am to do you the good I hope to do you. You have been the sole cause of the ruin of your home. You entered the home with a bad boy, whom you persisted in thinking an angel. Every business man in town could tell you things that would show any fair-minded person that from his infancy Jerry McTavish was a thief and a liar. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Coltrane, but I must be thorough with you. Likewise every business man in the town knows that Wilmer Coltrane was the soul of honor always. You reversed the thing and believed Jerry to be what Wilmer was and believed Wilmer to be what Jerry was. You made Wilmer suffer and induced his own father to treat him as if he had been a cheat and a liar."

"You couldn't expect a mother to believe bad things that were said about her boy, could you?"

"Perhaps not. I suppose not, Mrs. Coltrane, but the fact that you did as you did, coupled with the fact that George Coltrane was so nearly crazy about you, and willing to sell his soul, so to speak, to get you to love him as he loved you, did all the harm that has been done, and that is saying a plenty."

"I grant you a lot of harm has been done, but I cannot accede to your accusation that I am the one who did it."

"George has become a successful business man, Mrs. Coltrane. He has gotten into a line of work that he likes and that has made with him the difference between the failure he *was* and the success he *is*. That much is to the good. Wilmer has overcome the handicap under which his being a homeless boy placed *him*. He has clung to his high ideals, has acquired a good education, and is now preparing himself for the Christian ministry. He has not drawn nearly all the money his mother's will entitled him to draw. He has been economical and upright always. I am proud of him.

"Jerry, on the other hand, has followed his natural bent. He has been in jail several times. Possibly you did not know this. Now he has been sentenced to the Missouri penitentiary for life as an habitual criminal."

"Oh, don't tell me that, Mr. Henshaw! O Jerry, Jerry! Are you a bad boy, after all?"

Waiting until the mother's paroxysm of grief had abated, the banker went on: "It is very hard indeed for me to say these cruel things to you, Mrs. Coltrane, but I did not see how I could jar you awake

unless I told you. You need to wake up. You should approach George and Wilmer with proper humility and try to undo as much as it can possibly be done, the vast havoc you have caused. Will you not go quietly home and think over these things? If you are a praying woman, will you not pray over them? Any letter you may care to write, either to Wilmer or George I will forward to them."

As the tear-blinded woman stumbled out of the banker's office, there was no lessening of her hatred for Wilmer, which she had allowed to embitter her life and cause her no longer to have any consciousness of God's presence or favor. When her husband did not return, she had given herself up to self-pity. She was not addicted to airing her griefs before her friends and acquaintances, but she brooded over her lonely estate, the loss of her boy, and the necessity she was under of working to make money until, like a deadly cancer, her secret thoughts had eaten away all the joy of her Christian experience.

What the banker had told her was the first definite word she had ever had about Jerry since he had disappeared so unexpectedly that day when he had left her to go to school. She had spent lonely hours without number lying awake when she should have been asleep, going over her griefs, and always deciding that her precious boy had been driven from her by that wicked, "goody-goody" son of her husband's. At the beginning, something had stood up in her heart to question

the wisdom of her laying all the blame on Wilmer, but she put this gentle influence to flight so sternly that after a time there was no longer anything to restrain her unreasoning hatred of her absent stepson. Through the years this had settled down into a fixed state of mind.

Arriving home, she picked up Wilmer's letter. The impudence of it! To expect her to forgive him merely because he asked her to do it, when he had ruined her life and deprived her of a good and loving husband—to think of such a thing was absurd. She flung the letter into the fire and watched with grim satisfaction while it was consumed. She picked up the other letter containing the check for twenty-five dollars. Wilmer was rich. Didn't she remember all those many thousands of dollars, his mother had left him—fifty thousand was it, or was it half a million? Some vast sum. Now he thinks he is going to buy me, going to get me to fall on his neck with words of forgiveness, because of a miserable little twenty-five dollars.

She considered putting the check in the fire where the other letter had disappeared. But twenty-five dollars was twenty-five dollars, even if it *did* come from the hated Wilmer's vast store. No, she wouldn't burn the check. She would cash it and use the money economically. No telling how soon or late she would get any more money from either of the Coltranes. She presented it at the bank, and her signature on its back was the only evidence Wilmer had that she had received his letters.

All of his life George Fullerton had considered himself incurably lazy. He had had many kinds of jobs, but his tenure in each of them was short. Either the work would prove so onerous that he would quit or his employers would find him unsatisfactory and discharge him. He didn't know that his detestation of work was only a dislike for the kind of work he was given to do. Wilmer's strange, boyish delight in gazing by the hour at some great bridge, he had come honestly by from his father.

When Fullerton, as he walked dejectedly along the main street in Cheyenne, came to the window of the "Fix-It" shop, his interest kindled. He knew he would enjoy working where every job was unlike every other one. It would give scope for his inventive genius. He thought it would interest him. As soon as he had an interest in the business he found he had work he delighted in. He often felt mildly annoyed when the whistle blew warning him that he must lay down his tools and repair to his boarding house. He fell into the practice of spending his evenings at the shop, working away happily, always fixing something.

His natural ability in solving new and difficult problems having to do with the "Fix-It" business, combined with his extraordinary industry and solid integrity, under the blessing of God resulted in the steady growth of the business. He finally fitted up a room in the shop where he could sleep, and so when he would think of something new, even in the night, he

would often get up and work, possibly for hours, testing out his ideas. His enjoyment of his work was so great that often a whole day or more would pass without his even thinking of his unsatisfactory marital situation. When he received Wilmer's letter, he was greatly delighted. He wrote at once:

"My Precious Boy:

"Your wonderful letter is at hand. It had never occurred to me that you might owe me an apology. I had treated you in such an inexcusable way that however ill you might have felt toward me would have seemed all right to me, had I known about it. Now you send an apology. I can see that before God you *should* ask my forgiveness, and the fact that you do so shows the genuineness and depth of your experience. I have no feeling for you, Wilmer, but love—have never had since I awoke to what I had been doing to you. This was soon after your fourteenth birthday. I have nothing to forgive. I am so glad to hear from you again after these years and to know that you are succeeding in life so admirably notwithstanding the great hindrance my mistreatment of you must have been.

"I rejoice with you over your renewed faith in God, and I hasten to assure you that I have gone steadily forward, gaining higher and yet higher places in my Christian experience.

"I am delighted and astonished that you wrote apologetically to your stepmother. She was very unjust and unkind to you when you were small and helpless.

"Write me again soon, Wilmer, my precious son, and come to see me if you can find the time. My obligations to my employees and to the public confine me here very closely. The name I am known by in Cheyenne is that signed below.

"Your affectionate father,
"George Fullerton"

With the certificate showing her to be a Certified Public Accountant held lightly in her hand, Ethel reached her apartment. The goal for which she had striven so long had been attained, but where was the great, long anticipated joy of achievement? She had supposed she would be highly elated over having what she now possessed; but what she had accomplished, now that the toil was all behind her, seemed of little worth. She recalled a debate she had been in in her high-school days: "Resolved; That there is more pleasure in anticipation than in realization." She had believed then that the satisfaction to be experienced through achievement would surely be far greater than any that anticipation could bring. Now she was finding what many another ambitious striver has been surprised to discover, that the reverse is true.

Arriving at the rooms which for so long she had called home, she flung the certificate into her trunk without even reading it. She was disappointed. All her life she had looked forward to being in a position in which she would be looked to by a group of men, big men, men of brains and wealth who had achieved

much in the business world but who were now looking to her to lay out for them a business routine and mode of accounting that would enable them to make an even greater success. She had dreamed of straightening out intricate accounting tangles that the owners of the business were incapable of solving, and then finally, when her work in that plant had been completed, moving around among the members of the office force supervising their activities as they accustomed themselves to the new and better ways of keeping the company's books. She had imagined that the pleasure of such closing days with a great concern would be most delightful. Now, however, as she meditated gloomily over her future she thought it likely that she would not feel good at all when she had finished her work for a firm, judging by the way she was feeling with her freshly earned certificate in her possession.

Owing to a strong, inherited bent toward economy, it had been more to her liking through the years to save a dollar than to spend it. She was frugal but not parsimonious. But what should she do now? In some strange way the glamor that in her mind had always surrounded the idea of taking in a great concern the position of authority occupied by a certified public accountant seemed dissipated. Maybe she had as well walk around, go places, loaf, at least for a few weeks. Why not enjoy herself? Surely she had well earned some leisure. But *would* she enjoy herself? Could she spend time and money with no worthy purpose in view and get any satisfaction in doing

so? She would feel self-condemned the whole time. Her low opinion of men remained unchanged, so it did not occur to her to play around with them.

Was she going to remain single all her life? Her mind veered and attacked this long-neglected subject. Was she going to go on as she was and after a while be an old woman with no one to love her when she would be feeble or lonely? That was a distinctly unpleasant prospect. But to marry a man just to have a husband, without having that thing the novel writers played up as being such a romantic and wonderfully delightful experience — what would that amount to? In the five years since she had seen Wilmer Coltrane she had met a lot of men, but not one of them had attracted her more than passing attention. Light, vapid, foolish fellows with never a thought of anything but having a good time! Faugh! Why were men that way?

Gradually her attention became centered on Wilmer. She recalled that strange, last letter of his, telling how he had discarded the whole new code of morals being taught in the schools. She had never known just how to word a reply and eventually the matter had been lost sight of. Digging in her trunk, she found Wilmer's old letter written two years ago and read it again. Anyway he was different from the foolish fellows she had known. Wonder where he is? If she could have him without having to take his antiquated notions about the Bible and about the way young folk should live—probably that could not be.

He was so smart that if even she would try to show him how foolish he was in believing in old-fashioned Christianity, she had best look out or he would be the one who did the convincing. Besides, she wouldn't think of marrying a preacher, but he was a real man anyway.

The postman left a letter. According to the inscription on the envelope it was from Norton & Northcliffe, Publishers. They were feeling the necessity of having a better costs system installed, and while they were about it they wanted their entire method of accounting overhauled and brought into a more up-to-date form. She had been highly recommended by the university. Could they prevail upon her to undertake the task of reorganizing their business affairs? Acting on the advice of the university, they were offering her twenty-five dollars a day for her services.

This letter was like a match touched to tinder. The languor was gone. The idea of taking a leisurely rest flew out of the window. At last—at long last she was to be at work doing the highly technical, well-paid work of a certified public accountant. The mail seemed too slow. She sent an immediate wire of two words, "Accepted. Coming."

It seemed to her she hadn't been happy before for years. Hope deferred had made her heart sick. Now she was like a balloon from which bags of sand are being thrown. Her rich alto, formerly much prized and cultivated, but almost entirely silent during the last two years of her severe training, came back into

its own. Snatches of ragtime, a verse of a love ditty, and even a long neglected stanza of a hymn flowed from her loosened tongue. She was going to direct the reorganization of the accounting system of a great publishing house! She would see the awkward, archaic methods of doing business changed into a system of order and symmetry! In itself that would be a wonderful, thrilling experience, even if no pay were expected. The remuneration offered, in view of the time and money she had spent in fitting herself for this, her life's work, seemed somewhat meager, but what did she care about that? It was enough. She didn't need much for her personal expenses. Much money might become a sort of bother.

Arriving in Metropolis and being shown the task that confronted her, Ethel entered upon her duties and soon found that her thorough training and her naturally very acute mind enabled her to do the work asked of her by her employers in a manner satisfactory to them. The hours were short compared with the way she had been accustomed to working while at school, and this was a fly in the ointment, so to speak. She would have enjoyed working ten hours a day instead of six. Her idle time hung heavily on her hands.

Being a stranger in Metropolis, she had no *entree* into polite society, even had her inclinations led her that way, and so she did not meet men in a social way. Her employers were all family men.

One day as she strolled idly along in front of the business houses, looking with casual interest at the

window displays, her eye was arrested by the sight of a familiar face. True enough, it was only a picture, but it engaged her attention instantly. If she had wondered whether she could be mistaken in the identity of the man, that uncertainty would have been at once dispelled by the inscription. The picture was on a window card announcing a revival being held in the city by Evangelist Wilmer Coltrane.

He was older, more mature as shown in the picture, and much finer looking than when she had seen him last, as he was leaving her to go to the academy. In the picture his large, intensely black eyes, bright and steady, seemed to be looking straight into those of the beholder. No matter at what angle she stood gazing at the picture, those glorious eyes peered searchingly into her own. By his side was his trombone, while over his shoulders extended the straps that supported the piano-accordion on which he seemed about to begin playing. The card bore the name of the church and its pastor and extended to the public an invitation to attend the revival services.

For a long time Ethel stood gazing at the window card. When she would decide she had looked long enough, and be on the point of passing on down the street, she would pause to take one last, lingering look at the handsome face she remembered so well, and thus her moving on would be delayed.

She had nothing to do. Before seeing the window card she had been thinking she knew of no way in which to spend the idle time pleasantly or profitably.

From force of habit, she was on her way to the restaurant, but now she felt that dinner could wait. It didn't really matter whether she *ate* any dinner. If she didn't eat tonight, she could do so in the morning. Why not stay and look at Wilmer Coltrane's picture as long as she wanted to? It seemed to her lonely, love-hungry heart that to gaze at his picture did her almost as much good as seeing Wilmer himself would have done. Not that she confessed to herself that she was hungry for love. She didn't. Far from it. She was hungry for love without knowing it.

Possibly it was even better to look at his picture than it would be to see him. In fact, it probably *was* better. His picture could not talk and bring up those serious differences that would be sure to arise if she were to face his flesh and blood self.

Glancing at her watch, she observed that she had been staring at the window card for a full thirty minutes. That was long enough for anyone to spend reading the announcement of a revival-meeting, surely. But as that was the only renewal of her old acquaintance with Wilmer she was going to allow herself, why should she not stay as long as she wished? There was no reason why she should harrow her soul by seeing the man himself.

She now discovered to her astonishment and chagrin that if she once got with him she would want to be with him all the time, and she knew that could never be because of his religious views and habits. If they were together, differing as they did about such an ever-

present and fundamental thing as religious beliefs, they would constantly irritate each other.

She recalled his steady, life-long purpose to be a bridge builder. Something of a compelling nature must have come into his life to make him give up his long cherished ambition. Then, too, after having been thoroughly instructed as he had been in the Nietzschean code, he had turned back to believing in the Bible. Judging causes by effects, she realized that his belief in the Bible must rest upon what he deemed immovable foundations and made sure by incontrovertible evidence. No doubt he would be able and quick to bring forward the proofs that he considered conclusive with such clarity of thought and incisiveness of logic as almost to compel agreement with his thesis. She recalled how very clear his thinking used to be and how forcefully he had always been able to express his thoughts. By now, through intellectual training and attained maturity, he would doubtless be even more convincing than he had been when she was his classmate.

As Ethel sat at the table in the restaurant, she sought to put her girlhood sweetheart out of her mind. She ate slowly and read determinedly. She read the evening paper spread out before her with unusual care, even to the market reports. Her success in diverting her attention from Wilmer, however, was negligible. The face on the window card obtruded itself between her eyes and the printed page, no matter what she might be reading.

Long ago, she had quit attending church. To go where the Bible was spoken of as a collection of Jewish myths seemed to be a waste of valuable time, and any waste of time distressed her. She was already convinced that the Bible was not the Word of God, and what was the use of going to church to hear what was already dead killed again? To go where she would hear the Bible held up as the Word of God seemed hypocritical. It would be like pretending to believe what she did not believe. It would be supporting by her presence an institution that urged people to become Christians, that is to become either deceived or hypocritical. So, along with forsaking her prayers and her Bible reading, Ethel had long ago abandoned church attendance. Could she begin to go again? Would it be honest to go to church, her real reason being to see Wilmer Coltrane? Wouldn't it be saying, by actions, that she believed in churches?

He would talk of Jesus' having been born of a virgin. He would ask people to believe it. Could she listen without disputing what he said and retain her self-respect as an honest woman? She realized that the battle between unseen forces that had been raging in her soul was renewed. Her desire to see Wilmer was the thing, seemingly, that made it impossible for her to call an armistice. That desire would not down. She bought a detective story. She would get interested in the plot, and so be able to quit thinking about Wilmer.

Ethel's great determination had carried her success-

fully through long years of grueling work at school. So when she set out in earnest to clear her mind of Wilmer Coltrane, she stuck to her self-imposed task with unyielding determination. But when eleven o'clock came and the book was finished, she had to confess to herself that it had not interested her one whit. She had visualized every word, but all the time her mind had been occupied with the young minister wearing the piano-accordion.

Finally she fell asleep, and the next day she went at her work with a determination and persistence that astonished her employers. Thus she got through the day pretty well. Concentrating on the abstruse problems she was called upon to solve occupied her mind to the exclusion, for the most part, of the recollection of the face on the window card. But when the day was done, she knew Wilmer had been in the back of her mind all the time, and now he took full possession.

She wasn't unhappy in thinking about him. If it had not been that she knew she could never live in peace with anyone holding his antiquated views about the Bible, she would have taken immediate steps to renew her acquaintance with him. She decided not to look at the window card again. It was too upsetting. Still she did go that way to the restaurant, and she did stop and gaze, as she thought to herself, like an idiot, at the smiling, handsome face on the card.

While she looked, by one of those strange tricks of the memory familiar to us all, she was standing again

at the chancel rail taking the solemn vows of the church. God was very real. God was good. All of her life she recalled that she had been taught to love God, and now she did so. She knew in herself that the Holy Spirit had come in and had transformed her life. The woman standing before the window card recollected how happy she had been when, bidding good-by to the beloved old minister and leaving the church, she had gone to her knees beside her own bed. She relived in happy retrospect the peaceful months that had followed this precious experience before leaving home for school.

Coming to herself, Ethel realized that she had been day-dreaming. Was she getting into her dotage? She squared her shoulders, turned resolutely from the window, and proceeded to the restaurant. For years she had listened to learned men proving that the Scriptures are the most utter twaddle. She wouldn't throw away all the good sense they had put into her mind by taking up again the foolish notions about God and the Bible cherished by her in her girlhood.

What was the matter with her anyway? Never before had she felt as she was feeling now about any other man she had ever seen. Could it be that that tender feeling she had had for Wilmer when she was a girl but which the last two years she had sternly put out of her heart had been the real thing? Could it be that the reason she had never become more than mildly interested in any other man was that her love for Wilmer was real? Life was a funny thing. Just

when you got something settled, and all labeled and pigeonholed, up would spring something else to disarrange the whole setting. She would go to the library and get a book on psychology. Maybe she could get a line on what was the matter with her if she delved into what men of science had written about the human mind. Hers was acting in a manner most decidedly erratic. That was plain.

But the fight went on. Not once did she think that one of the combatants fighting for her soul was the Holy Spirit. Neither did she realize that the definite, genuine experience with God she had had in her girlhood is a thing very difficult to be driven out of one's life and reckoning by any kind of reasoning whatsoever. A single ounce of experience in such a matter is worth more than a ton of worldly-wise reasonings.

A genuine battle was being waged in Ethel's soul, and after a while she began vaguely to realize the fact. She perceived that one part of her was bringing up arguments to prove that the Bible is a mere lot of myths and unreliable opinions of antiquated and misinformed ancients, while at the same time another part of her was standing, as it seemed, poised almost on tiptoe, to renew the argument showing that what one knows by experience he knows for sure.

After a while she decided that she was the umpire in this tussle and that for the time being she would call it a draw and think of something else. Could she hope for a life of even reasonable satisfaction if she should marry Wilmer, supposing that he would

go on to the end holding the obsolete views he now held? Someone seemed to pop up inside her and say: "Are you so sure they are obsolete? Do you not know there have been a host of men of the finest minds who have believed implicitly just what he believes?"

Then the battle was on again, rough and tumble, it seemed to Ethel, as she sat a half amused spectator watching the conflict in her soul. First one would seem to win and be demanding a decision by her as the umpire, then the other would have an inning and make out a pretty good case on his side. It was exhausting.

In a half-ashamed way she knew, deep in her inner consciousness that all the time since she had first seen the window card she had only been pretending to fight. From the very start it had been her purpose, resolutely denied and strongly disputed, but her purpose nevertheless, to go to see Wilmer Coltrane and hear him preach. The human heart as a battleground of contending moral forces is one of the strangest things there is. It knows, really, the battle is mere pretense, and that the thing it wants to do and which it is fighting against will, in the end, be done. The fight in Ethel was between the Spirit of God on the one hand and Satan on the other, striving for a soul.

Finally she left the library. What was she going to do? Keep on this way until she lost her mind? Did people ever lose their minds in such a way? It seemed as if she might do so if she could not stop

thinking about Wilmer and his beliefs. Would that be going insane over religion? She had heard of women's having gone insane that way. But she didn't have any religion. Religion was "all the bunk." She couldn't go insane over something she didn't believe in. She was safe there.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AS the days after Mrs. Coltrane had decided to cash Wilmer's twenty-five dollar check dragged their weary length along, the angry woman was greatly distressed and very miserable. When she reached home after her interview with the banker, she told herself she was very angry with Albert Henshaw. Probably she would be compelled to call on him not only again but often in the future. Such a prospect was dreadful to think about. He was brutal and stony-hearted. Never before had she had anyone speak to her so unfeelingly. But what could she do? How she hated Wilmer for having caused all this terrible distress!

If she could only move away, if she could go where George was! Who would think George would ever be a successful businessman? It was strange! But at the end, just before he had left, George had seemed very strange, too. She had meant to help him to be a success, and so she had kept him steadily at his work while he was with her, but he had never been a successful man. With her, he had failed. Without her, he had succeeded! Wilmer, too, had succeeded. How had that come? How could he deceive everyone but her into thinking he was something fine?

Her mind traveled back to the time when the question of the two dimes had come up. She didn't *know* that Wilmer had taken them. Jerry hadn't said he had seen Wilmer coming out of her room or anything like that. Could it be after all that Jerry had taken the dimes? If it had been anyone else who had run away when the sheriff had inquired after him, she would have said it showed a guilty conscience. But Jerry! Could it be that her Jerry had stolen? He had told her things sometimes that she had afterwards found were not true. But of course any boy would do that. Mrs. Smith and Pete both said that Jerry had never been at their house.

If Jerry only knew how his mother loved him, and how lonely she was without him! But he had never sent her a line since he had started off to school that morning. *That* was not right. A good boy might get frightened and run away when the sheriff was after him, but he *could* write to his mother. He was in the penitentiary as an habitual criminal! That meant that he had been found guilty several times. One jury might convict an innocent, good boy. Maybe two might do it; but not several. But she couldn't, she just couldn't believe Jerry was a thief.

If Jerry had been a liar and a thief all along, as Wilmer had said he was that awful day when they were talking about the two dimes, maybe *Jerry* took the dimes. She had always thought if he did anything wrong he had learned it from Wilmer, but a glimmer of fairness crept into the sadly disturbed

woman's heart and she recalled that Jerry never had been out nights with Wilmer. Wilmer had almost always been at home when Jerry was away.

If Jerry *did* steal the two dimes, then she and George had wrongly accused Wilmer. If that was so, then what Henshaw had said, that she was the one who was to blame for all the distress—but she would never admit that she had mistreated Wilmer—

Mrs. Coltrane was being wooed by the Lord whom she had forgotten. If she had but known it, the Holy Spirit was busily engaged in bringing to her mind things calculated to put her under conviction. For a long time she had hung on to her profession of Christianity, and until she found that no matter how much she prayed her distress and her burdens remained the same. Then she had thought ill of the Lord and had quit praying.

It had never occurred to her that it was she and not the Lord, as Henshaw had pointed out, and not Wilmer who was to blame for her distress of mind and her lonely and deserted state. She would write to George. If George would be like he used to be, she could be happier with him, even if Jerry *was* in such a dreadful place, than she ever could be where she would have to go to Henshaw from time to time for money.

"My Darling Husband:

"I am so lonely. Mr. Henshaw just told me that Jerry is in the penitentiary. It makes me cry, as of course you know it must, but I have to weep alone.

Henshaw says you are now a successful business man. I am so proud of you. I knew when I selected you as my choice among all the men there were, that you could succeed.

"What sort of business are you in, George? I wish I could be there to see that your clothes were kept in shape and that you always have the proper food. Maybe you have been lonely sometimes, too, Precious.

"I remember how you used to want me to show how I loved you. Often I wouldn't do it. I thought you would think more of me if I kept you a little bit in doubt about my loving you truly. But I find I was wrong. I ought to have been out and out just what I felt. Please forgive me.

"I haven't written you for a long time, but I didn't know how to reach you until today when Henshaw told me I could do so by handing my letter to him.

"Your lonely, loving wife,
"Elizabeth

"P.S. Maybe Henshaw has told you that Wilmer has completed several years of schooling since he left high school and is now an evangelist. He thinks Wilmer is wonderful. You will be glad to know he thinks so, I am sure.

"Lovingly,
"Your lonely Bessie"

Desiring to see Wilmer well, wishing to know whether he would recognize her if given a good chance, and wondering what his reaction would be if he did recog-

nize her, Ethel took a seat only about one-third of the way back from the front. She was there early, although she had waited about as long before starting as she had thought she could. She wondered what was the matter with her. Could she never do anything anymore but think about Wilmer Coltrane?

Wilmer came down the aisle, passing not over four feet from where Ethel sat. She believed she should have known him anywhere, even if she had not been feasting her eyes on his picture for days and seeing his likeness between her and the printed page when she had tried to turn her thoughts away from him by reading.

15747

When he faced the congregation, greeting them with a rare smile by which he seemed to take them into his arms in a loving embrace, her heart missed a beat. How wonderful he was! What a marvelous combination of regal power and compassionate humility his appearance presented! That he had his congregation in the hollow of his hand was evident, but that he felt himself completely under the will of Another was also plain to any observer. Never had she seen anyone to compare with him in any way in all the years since she had left Clinton.

"We are going to learn a new chorus tonight," he announced, speaking with that fine smile that made people flock to his ministry wherever he went. He played the air through on his accordion and then, accompanying himself, sang:

He will cast all our sins in the depths of the sea,
In the depths of the sea, in the depths of the sea.
Because He delighteth in mercy, saith He,
"I will cast all your sins in the sea."

When he had sung it through twice, he called on the congregation to sing it with him, and in a few minutes a great volume of sound went out as the people joined heartily in singing the chorus. It seemed to Ethel the people felt almost as much thrilled by the evangelist as she did herself.

His eyes roved over the congregation and when, in traveling from face to face they reached hers, she thought he looked surprised. During the service, she observed his letting his eyes return to study her face many times. Other than this, he gave no sign of recognition. She tried to act as if he were a stranger to her, but, feeling as she did, she afterwards doubted whether she had made a success of it.

Ethel enjoyed the service notwithstanding she had attended it expecting and really intending to be bored. It was interesting, indeed it was thrilling, and she felt sure she would have enjoyed it even if she had not known the evangelist. She told herself that if she had had the privilege of attending such services while she had been away from her childhood home at school, she never would have lost faith in God. Why couldn't all preachers make one feel so sure the Bible was all it claimed for itself? His faith in it was contagious.

The testimony-meeting was something new to Ethel. Where she had had her church experience, people had

not been asked to testify. A man told of his having been a gutter drunkard; that for years he had himself been without hope, and had been given up as hopeless by all who knew him; that he came to church one night and heard about Jesus, accepted Him as his Savior and Lord, and ever since had had no craving for liquor. His joy in being saved, he said, was so great that sometimes he did not know how to behave himself properly.

A woman told of her home having been revolutionized when she and her husband had accepted Jesus as their Lord. A young man testified to having been wonderfully saved from sin and from his craving for cigarettes. So it went, on and on. It astonished Ethel, for she had never appreciated the fact that the Lord will actually save men from the power of temptation.

The text was, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The preacher made it plain that "God is the ruler of the universe, and as such ruler, and because He is just and upright, He must punish those who disobey His laws and separate them finally from those who, because they accept the salvation He will give them, are able to and do live lives of obedience. It would be unjust to take the wicked into the same place of bliss into which He takes those who trust in Him.

"But everyone has sinned, and the punishment for sin is death. So everyone must be punished with death unless someone takes their place and dies in their stead. This is just what happened. Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, and God laid on Him the sins of all of

us. Bearing these sins killed Him. So, my sins having been suffered for, and I having been punished for my sins by proxy, God can accept me as His child and impute to me the righteousness of His Son, Jesus. He does this when I accept Jesus as my Savior. God can justify me, that is find me not guilty when I come before Him, even though I may have sinned ever so much, because my sins have already been suffered for, because I have already, in my Substitute, been punished for my sins. God can do this and yet be just.

"It wouldn't be just to forgive me unless Jesus had suffered for my sins. Will you take Him as your Savior tonight? Will you do this and ask God to give you the righteousness of Christ, impute it to you, so you can be innocent in God's sight? He loves you. He gave His precious Son to die for you. Will you accept that divine Son as your Savior? Will you do it tonight while He calls to you?"

As Wilmer bowed his head to ask that God would help sinners to present themselves to Christ, accepting Him as their Savior, Ethel slipped quickly out of the building. When Wilmer opened his eyes, he saw at once that she had gone.

Ethel felt that her foundations had been shaken. For years she had listened to artfully phrased demonstrations professing to prove that the Bible is not true and that there is nothing to Christianity; that while it is true that there was a man named Jesus, who lived in Palestine, of course He was merely a man. True enough, He had proclaimed a splendid message and performed

many kindly acts, but finally He had been prosecuted in the courts and executed as a criminal. If He had been God's Son, as is claimed, God would not have allowed them to mistreat Him in such a way.

But now, after having been to such a remarkable service, what Ethel had come to feel was as sure as the multiplication table seemed to be fading before her eyes. She wondered whether she were being carried away by her love for the minister? She was in love with him. That fact she could not deny. Was her love so obscuring her intellectual outlook that she could no longer perceive the truth of what the professors had drilled into her so thoroughly? She realized with chagrin that she was again in the broad valley of decision.

Anyway, Wilmer was wonderful to look at. She felt sure he would be as wonderful to talk to. But she would not be guilty of the insane folly of allowing herself to talk to him alone and face to face. If she should do that, she would be so enthralled by his charm that she could never direct another firm in the intricate matter of rearranging its accounting system, the while knowing that Wilmer was not for her.

As she pondered these tremendous issues, it seemed that all her years of effort in equipping herself for her life work were in danger of being cast to the moles and bats, all for the love of a man who held such absurd opinions that she could not live with him.

Wilmer was being entertained in Metropolis in the home of the Wallaces, only a block from the church. Walking home with them after the service in which he

had seen someone who looked like Ethel, he said: "Do you know any lady here named Fulbright, Sister Wallace? When I was a boy I knew a girl by that name. I haven't seen her for several years, but a young lady in the congregation tonight reminded me so much of my old schoolmate."

"I never heard that name before, Brother Coltrane. But a lady of that name might be here and I not know anything about it; besides that, women have a way of changing their names when they are young. Why didn't you speak to her and make sure for yourself?"

"She left before I was free to go down into the congregation."

"I presume from that she didn't know you. If she had been your old schoolmate she would have stayed until she could have renewed her acquaintance. If you will allow me to say it, young women do not lightly throw away an opportunity to speak to such a young man as you are."

"You ought not to say that, Sister Wallace. All there is about me that is good, God gave to me."

"Well, I like to see people humble, but just the same I think if the girl used to be your schoolmate she would have stayed. She would be under no uncertainty as to *your* identity, for she would have known your name from the advertisements that are scattered everywhere over the city."

In his room, Wilmer knew he was profoundly stirred and deeply interested to know the identity of the woman who looked like Ethel, but he must not allow

himself to become agitated over the matter. No doubt Ethel had married before this. That fact alone, as she would remember her girlhood vows, would keep her from contacting him or perhaps from coming again to service. He recalled vividly the contents of her last letter in which she had made it plain that she had parted completely with her faith in God. He pondered the fact that she had never answered his letter written soon after his faith in Christ had been restored, in which he had told her of his wonderful experience and the fact that he was to be an evangelist, called by God. If she were still single, God's solemn prohibition of any marriage of a child of God to an unbeliever would make it impossible for him ever to claim her as his bride.

He decided to dismiss all thoughts of Ethel from his mind. He set about meditating and praying over the various phases of the service just closed and then prepared for bed. After spending considerable time on his knees, earnestly committing his way to the Lord in trust and confidence, and begging that Christ might be made very real to the lives of the people who had shown an interest in the welfare of their souls, he switched off the light and settled himself for sleep.

Then he found that seemingly sleep was impossible because of the active way in which his mind roved over all the experiences he had had with Ethel ever since he had seen her that first time as a vision of glorious loveliness when she had started to school in Clinton. He recalled, too, the many times he had thought tenderly about her since he had written her last.

Unlike Ethel, he had a divine Helper to whom he could go and on whom he could call when in need. Slipping out of bed, he kneeled and prayed definitely that God would give sleep to his eyelids and enable him to avoid wasting his time in useless cogitations. When people will fully yield themselves to God and expect Him to answer prayer, He will do so, and consequently when Wilmer lay down again he was soon asleep, gathering strength for another day's work in the service of the Lord.

The next day was a trying one. Before he left the breakfast table, a call was handed him to come to the aid of a young woman hurt in a car wreck. In a hospital bed, he found her, to a large extent benumbed to her pain and entirely conscious. As soon as he entered the room he recognized a girl who had been in the service the night before and often previously.

"I am dying, Brother Coltrane. You don't know me, but I know you. I have been attending the services. I am Alice Throckmorton."

"Does the surgeon give you no hope?"

"He says my back is broken and that I will die. But God has allowed me to keep the right use of my mind, and I am so glad, for I have things to do."

"Is the Savior precious to you just now, Miss Throckmorton?"

"I have grieved away the Holy Spirit Brother Coltrane. I confess it to you. I have already confessed it to God and asked Him to forgive me. I once was so happy in the Lord. I knew Him as my personal

Savior. I prayed to Him with gladness, and He often answered my prayers. But I went to college, and there I came to believe in Modernism. Evolution was taught in the classes, and the Virgin Birth was scoffed at in the chapel services as being contrary to nature and so, of course, impossible. I gave up my Bible reading and my praying. Then I became worldly. I began frequenting picture shows and private dances. These things seemed all right when I was well, but now I must die. Can you help me, Brother Coltrane? Is there any hope for me?"

"Surely, surely there is hope. God is merciful. God loves you. His mercies are fresh every morning. He tells us that in His Word. God will answer you when He hears you calling to Him in penitence. If you could get well would you serve Him with all your might?"

"I would. Oh, if I could only get up I would show God and show everyone my gratitude by the way I would live."

"Tell that to the Lord, Sister Throckmorton. Confess your awful sins to Him, and ask Him to forgive you. He will do it. Here, read with me: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' The Apostle John wrote that to *Christian* people, exhorting them in the same letter: 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' The letter is written to Christian people who

sin. Jesus, your Savior, notwithstanding your sins of unbelief and worldliness, stands at the throne of God interceding for you. God will forgive if you ask Him. He will answer Jesus' prayer for you when He sees you have come back to Jesus as your Savior."

"Let me read it again, Brother Coltrane. It seems too good to be true that God will forgive me after I have grieved away His Spirit by all my unbelief and my wicked ways."

So they read again the wonderful words that have been used by the Spirit in bringing back to the fold many thousands of wandering sheep: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"You see, Miss Throckmorton, God will not only forgive you the sins of the past, but He will wash out all the stains they have made on your soul, in the blood of His Son. Now, we shall just tell it all to the Father. He is waiting to be gracious."

"Father," the dying girl prayed, "I believe the precious words I have just read in the Bible. I confess my sins. I am so, so sorry I believed men when they told me the Bible was not to be relied on. It is the Word of God. I am sorry for all my idle, careless, foolish ways. My sins crush me down like a mountain. Thou wilt forgive. Oh, do forgive me, and wash my black heart, defiled by all my sins. Make me again as white as wool, whiter than snow."

"Do it for Jesus' sake," Wilmer added. "He bore all these later sins in His precious body on the accursed

tree, too, Father. Forgive this penitent, dying child of Thine, and let her come in peace to Thee."

"How good, how very, very good God is, Brother Coltrane! He has forgiven me and washed me. I am clean. Oh, I wish I could see some of my friends and tell them how good God is."

"Give me the names of some of them, and I will send them word that you want to see them. Should you like to have me do that?"

In this way it came about that one and another of Alice Throckmorton's friends were admitted to her room that day. The doctors made no protest, as they said she was dying, and nothing could do her any harm. The dying girl retained her clearness of mind and was given strength to tell her friends one after the other her story. Were they not glad she had made her peace with God again? Would they not repent before God had to deal with *them* in some dreadful way? It was so wonderful to know that one's sins were all forgiven and that one was held in high esteem by the great, good God.

Thus Alice Throckmorton talked throughout the day, and when a visitor would permit her to do it, she prayed with her and induced *her* to pray and commit her life to God. While she was praying with the last one, just as the sun went down, her call came. She looked up and with a radiant smile said, "Yes, Jesus, I am coming," and left this vale of tears to lay at the Master's feet three priceless souls saved at her bedside that last and most eventful day of her short life. Wilmer was present when her call came, and he gently closed the sightless

eyes. He then called the nurse, who at the moment was not in the room.

That night, as Wilmer sat behind the pulpit earnestly praying the God of all grace to fill him afresh with the Holy Spirit and enable him to preach the Word in yet greater power, he thought of the strenuous day during which he had many times passed in and out of the dying girl's hospital room.

Would Ethel come to the service? He no longer entertained any doubt that the girl he had seen *was* Ethel. His view being somewhat obstructed by the pulpit, he could not see all of the congregation; but the place where she had sat the preceding night was vacant. If she *should* come in, he must try to control his features. It wouldn't be the thing for a man called of God to the ministry of the Word to let any sinner know how it thrilled him to see her again. Maybe God would save the girl through his ministry, and if and when she had become really restored to the faith in God in which she had been reared, it would be time enough for him to display special interest in her.

He was ashamed of the tense eagerness he could not help feeling as he kept close watch over the place where she had sat the night before. So much had happened since he had seen her last that it seemed a long while before. It was only after he had announced the opening chorus that he saw her coming in. "God help me now," he cried in his secret heart, "to keep my face from showing the feelings I have for one who has rejected Thy Word."

He told as graphically as he could the wonderful story of his early morning call to the dying bed of Alice Throckmorton. He described the way the girl had been led away from her Lord by the wicked professors who had taught her that Jesus was not the Son of God, but the son of Joseph, like any other man; and that the resurrection could not have taken place because it would have been contrary to Nature. He explained how they had finally wrecked her faith and caused her to give up her Bible reading and her private prayers.

"After this," Wilmer said, "she had nothing to hold her, and she became worldly and vain and self-centered, thus grieving away the Holy Spirit." Then he told of the several friends to whom the dying girl had witnessed during the day, with some of whom she had prayed. Wilmer closed the recital by inquiring:

"Is any one of those who found the Lord at Alice Throckmorton's bedside today, here? Should you like to stand and tell what the Lord has done for your soul?"

Two of the three arose and gave tearful witness to the saving grace of the Lord, causing a wave of sympathetic tears to sweep over the house.

The sermon over, as the concluding prayer was being offered, again Ethel slipped quickly out of the building. When Wilmer opened his eyes and saw her seat vacant, his heart became sick. If he only could know there was no hope of her ever being anything more to him than she had been for years past, it seemed to him it would have been comparatively easy to steel himself against the pain of it and push ahead with his work.

CHAPTER NINE

LONG and painfully, George Fullerton pondered the questions raised by Elizabeth's letter forwarded to him by Henshaw. The lonely man's life was fully consecrated to God, so all he had to decide was what God wanted him to do. Elizabeth might or might not be speaking with perfect honesty in using the terms of endearment as she had done or in making the general tone of her letter so appealing and affectionate. She had spoken of Wilmer without displaying any rancor, but how would she act if he and she were together, he taking sides with Wilmer?

He felt deeply convinced that he had formerly sinned, grievously sinned, in not standing up for Wilmer. He would never fail his boy again. There was no question of any other woman. Often he had been very lonely, and twice he had felt a strong temptation to get a divorce and be free to make love to a certain attractive woman who had seemed to be accessible. But he had not yielded to the temptation. In that regard he had kept himself unspotted from the world.

He felt very happy as again and again he read Elizabeth's letter. If she had only spoken and acted when he was with her, the way the letter led him to

believe she now felt, would he have left? Surely it would have been a much harder wrench to do so, but her attitude toward Wilmer had been such that he could not have continued with her without standing up for Wilmer, and, so far as he could see, that would have destroyed the peace of his home. If he should bring her to him in Cheyenne, would not that very situation arise again? Would she not when he insisted that Wilmer be spoken of lovingly and appreciatively in the home, fly into a rage and bring up the old contention? He believed she would. He let a month go by as he pondered over these matters and spread them out before the Lord. Then he wrote, sending his letter to Henshaw:

"My Precious Wife:

"That you are precious to me, I cannot deny. It may not seem to you that I act the part, but if you knew how lonely I have been, and how the loving way you wrote thrilled me, you would not doubt that I love you. I have not allowed any other woman to enter my life in a way that would make her a trespasser on your rights as my lawful wife. I promised in a vow before God that I would forsake all others and keep to you only, so long as both of us should live. Vows once taken must not be broken. I shall not break mine. I fear God. I love God. And I refuse to do anything that I believe would grieve Him.

"It would give me great pleasure to have you come to me and make me a home. My first impulse as I read your letter was to wire you the money to come.

But a difficulty arose. When we spoke years ago of Pete Smith's having waked up, I said, 'He is not the only one who has awakened.' You probably do not remember my saying that, but I remember it well. I had been asleep. I had been so busy trying to arouse in your heart a love that would be demonstrated in the way that my first venture in matrimony had taught me wifely love should be shown, that I had overlooked my obligations to my son. I was so preoccupied with my love-making that I did not realize the hard place you and Jerry were putting Wilmer in; and once at least, when he wanted me to hear his side of a matter in which you and Jerry accused him, I shut him up and sent him supperless to bed.

"When I awoke, I saw what I had done. It was too late for me to make amends to Wilmer. He had already disappeared, driven from his only home by a love-blinded stepmother because his own father had failed him. With breaking heart, I realized this and came under deep conviction of sin.

"Then it was that I told you Pete was not the only one who had waked up. You did not understand, of course, for I give you credit with having been an honest woman. You did not falsely accuse Wilmer of Jerry's sins knowingly. You, however, allowed your mother love so to obscure your vision that you could not, and, may I dare to say it, you *would* not see the truth.

"I saw no way in which I could do right by my boy, standing up for him, appreciating him, defending

him, and still have, while doing so, even a measure of peace with you. I had failed him all along, but I had promised God I would fail him no more. So, as I could not keep faith with him while living with you, I saw no other way than to leave, take another name in some new location, and try to serve God according to my light.

"I see nothing in your letter to convince me that the situation would be any different now if I were again habitually in your presence. I should feel it my privilege and duty to speak in terms of highest commendation of a boy who against the odds that Wilmer faced could still keep to his ideals and succeed in life as he is doing. So I cannot ask you to come to me. I have sent you enough money, as I reckon it, so that you, if you have worked as hard as I work, have had your needs supplied. This was my duty as your husband. It remains my duty, and I shall continue to do as I have done.

"Doubtless I shall continue also to be very lonely, but life is short, and when I come to the end of it, having pursued the course I am now outlining to you for myself, I shall lay me down in peace and later rise to meet my Lord.

"Now that I have bared my soul, made my humble confession, and let you know that my heart yearns for the helpmeet true that I thought I was getting when I married you, you can see precisely what it is that stands in the way of our being reunited. It is you who must make a total change in your mental attitude. If

you decide to meet the condition which this letter will reveal to your discerning mind as necessary to be met, you may write me again.

"I am, Elizabeth, your faithful, loving, lonely husband.

"George"

When, under cover of the prayer with which Wilmer closed his message, Ethel Fulbright had glided noiselessly and swiftly out of the church, her mind was made up. The story he had told about the girl in the hospital, corroborated as it was by the testimonies of the two young women, had her mind been open, would have proved to be the added weight needed again to make the balance settle on the side of faith in God and His Bible. But her mind was closed. She reasoned that she had come to hold the beliefs that were now hers as the result of careful thought and competent instruction during the years in which she had been intellectually mature. Her decision had been made with great carefulness, and she intended to let it be final.

The idea of her making herself known to Wilmer with the hope that she might get him for her husband engaged her attention momentarily but was speedily dismissed. She could not hope to convince him that her views of the Bible were right, for no doubt he was thoroughly settled in *his* views. Her beliefs, differing from his as they did, made a marriage with him unthinkable.

She couldn't even be in the same city with him, she

had discovered, and have any peace of mind. There was just one thing for her to do. She had intended to stay another week with the publishers, but they would have to get along without her. She would give them notice that she was leaving at once. It would be hard, cruelly hard, never to see Wilmer again, but her lot would be harder if she should marry him. When she had gotten away and was busy elsewhere she could get control of herself again and enjoy her work as she had been doing when she had first seen Wilmer's picture on the window card.

Ethel got no real sleep that night, the battle was so fierce, but in the morning she spoke to the president, "I am leaving Friday, that is tomorrow night."

When work was over Friday, Ethel packed her belongings ready to leave on the midnight train. Where she should go, she had not definitely decided. She felt no impulse to go to Clinton to see her mother. Possibly she had as well go back to Chicago, where the university would keep her in mind when inquired of by firms wanting help. At any rate, she would leave on the midnight train, thus getting out of Metropolis, and to where she could again, she hoped, get control of her mind and heart and have a measure of peace.

She decided it could do no harm — all the harm that could be done had already been done, surely — for her to attend Wilmer's service once more. She had missed one night and the remembrance of it made her unwilling to stay away another time. She had roamed the main streets of the city until she had felt that to

stay out longer might appear an impropriety. Then she had listened to the radio, tried to read, wandered about her room, done everything it seemed but pray, until the small hours of the night, hoping to so exhaust herself that it would seem worth while to try to sleep. She would go once more and see Wilmer, and then she would leave.

On the night when Ethel had been roaming the streets Wilmer had stood up in the pulpit and announced the opening hymn, almost trembling, he thought, with suppressed longing and excitement. Ethel's place was vacant. Would she come in a little late as she had done once before? He carried on the service, eagerly watching the door. She was late. It was getting very late. It looked as though she were not coming. He got through the service the best way he could. He sang and smiled and preached and exhorted sinners to come to Christ. No one guessed how his heart was tortured with fear that Ethel had decided, after facing the question again, that she did not care to resume her acquaintance with him.

The dragging hours of the night following the service were torture. He would pray and yield his life anew to God, thus gaining the victory over the demands of his heart. Then he would settle himself to go quietly to sleep. But again he would get to thinking about how it would be to go on alone without Ethel. Soon, in spite of all he could do, he would be trembling again with the effort to control himself, and sleep would once more be out of the question. Then he would pray again,

weeping and confessing his shame at being so disturbed by his yearning for an unbeliever, and committing his way to the Lord, until peace would come again and he would be almost asleep. Then he would see himself walking alone down the long pathway of life, and sleep would again be out of the question.

So the night passed and Friday came. The service that night was to be the last one of the week. How could he go through with it?

When he arose from his knees and stepped forward to announce the opening hymn, he saw Ethel. The intolerable load that seemed to have been crushing him for many hours seemed suddenly to lift. He did his best not to show his joy at seeing her, but it was a vain effort. He was too much delighted. The long strain of uncertainty had too greatly weakened his powers of self-control.

When she read his thoughts, Ethel was frightened. Her true course, while she had known it was most painful, distressingly so, had seemed plain to her. Her decision had been reached with nothing to fight but the insistent demands of her own heart; but when she saw Wilmer's sad and listless eyes light up and begin to glow as he caught sight of her, she knew she had failed to take into account a vital and necessary thing to be considered.

He was feeling about her the way she was feeling about him. If she should go away as she had intended to do, she would not only break her own heart, a thing she had contemplated with a sort of grim satisfaction,

the satisfaction of the martyr who dies rather than do a wrong thing, but she would break *his* heart as well. That was a thing of an entirely different sort. She sat through the service without hearing it. What should she do? What *could* she do? The question so loudly demanded an answer that she could not hear even the singing.

When Wilmer opened his eyes at the conclusion of the prayer with which he closed his message, he looked instantly and observed that Ethel had not left as on previous occasions. What did it mean? He walked on air as he proceeded with the service, bringing it to a close.

"Wilmer," Ethel said as she reached out to take his hand, "I have something that I must say to you. I must say it before my train leaves at midnight. Can we go somewhere and be alone?"

"To do so will be a real pleasure to me, Ethel. Would a restaurant serve?"

"I was sure," he glowed as they left the church together, "it would be most delightful to feel you by my side again, Ethel, your little hand resting in the crook of my arm; but I didn't know it would be so wonderful as it is. The amount of intense satisfaction that can be packed into a single moment of time is astonishing."

"In a way, I am glad you feel that way, Wilmer. I have often wondered whether we should ever be together again. I have thought many times about the vows we took so solemnly when we were boy and girl

together. The memory of those vows, really, is what caused me to speak to you tonight."

"What you say has a strange sound, Ethel. I am eager to hear the explanation. Here we are. Darby's is the most exclusive place in town, I am told, but none too good for the lady I bring tonight to his fashionable tables."

In a retired corner, looking across at each other, these lovers sat. Each realized that the occasion was big with destiny, and this made them somewhat breathless.

"Make your order, Ethel; then I shall have something."

"I feel as if I should never want anything more to eat, Wilmer. I shall order only a little, for even at a time like this there is something in me that opposes wasting anything."

Just then the waiter came and Ethel said, "Bring me a pineapple sundae, please. That will be all."

"The same for me." Then:

"I am all atwitter, Ethel, waiting for you to explain your saying you were glad *in a way* that I appreciated so much being with you again."

"What I must tell you is very hard for me to utter. If I were not sure about the way you feel, I could not say it. It may seem to you unmaidenly even."

"I am completely in the dark, Ethel; but I am sure that nothing you will say will sound to me immodest."

"I love you, Wilmer. I have no words capable of making you understand *how* I love you, but the fact

grieves me unspeakably. All the years since we plighted our troth together on the street in Clinton, whenever I have seen a man who looked good and companionable, it took me only an interview or two to discard him. I couldn't appreciate his good points because of comparing him with you. Was he handsome and courteous? 'Not up to Wilmer,' I would say. Did he appear to be loving and unselfish? 'Not up to Wilmer,' I'd think. Whatever excellence he might have, it was always the same, 'Not up to Wilmer,' and so I would lose all interest in him."

"Feeling that way, Ethel, why did you quit writing to me?"

"For the same reason that caused me to leave the service the night before last and the night before that without speaking to you. I knew I wanted to marry you. I wanted it more than I have ever wanted anything else. I want to marry you now. But knowing that I could not, dared not do so, made me determine not to write to you again.

"Then when I saw your picture on a window card, the same thing made me determine I would not go where you were. To read your letters, or to see your darling face — the latter much more than the former — made my life insupportable. I stayed away from church until it seemed I should lose my mind. Then I went. It was as I had foreseen it would be. I wanted you and, knowing I could not have you was like what you picture as hell."

"I never gave you any cause to think I was not eager

to marry you when we should each be through school. Is there something over which I have no control that presents the difficulty?"

"There is not and has not been any other man, if that is what you are thinking?"

"You have confessed again your love for me, Ethel, saying, however, that you cannot marry me. I am going to confess my love for you, also, without asking you to marry me. I have had years of loneliness, marked by almost identical experiences with the women I have met. What is in the way, Ethel?"

"I only love the part of you that I like. You hold a set of beliefs that have made you discard the wisdom taught you by the schools and abandon your long cherished purpose to build great bridges. I despise you for that. If we were married, my hatred of this quality in you would breed storms and discord, wrecking your life as well as my own.

"Also my love for you is of the jealous sort. I could not bear to have you going up and down the land smiling at others and helping them, even though I knew your purposes were as pure as the driven snow. As you did it, I should become morose and hateful and break your heart. I want you for myself to the exclusion of everyone else. When I could not have you that way, there is no telling to what extremes I should go. That being the case, my love for you is not the kind that would stand the tests and strains of married life.

"You believe the Bible. *I* know it is a mass of Jewish myths. But I could never convince you of this.

You feel that you have such good reasons for believing it that if I undertook to convince you I should only distress you without in the least changing your views. For you to live with anyone feeling as I do about the Bible you love so intensely would ruin your life. For me to live with anyone, no matter how otherwise delightful, knowing that all the time he was grieving his heart out because I was going to hell, would make life intolerable for me. Our marriage, no matter how faithfully we should each try to make it a success, would necessarily be a failure. That answers your question."

"I am very sorry for you, Ethel. Does the fact that you *are* talking with me tonight indicate that you have thought of a possible solution of the problem?"

"No, Wilmer. I had made up my mind to leave and so try to forget and again have some peace of mind. I am employed here by a publishing concern as a certified public accountant, the goal toward which, as you know, I have pressed through the weary years. I notified them today that, notwithstanding my work is not done, I should leave tonight. My things are packed ready to take the midnight train, as I said a while ago. In a moment of weakness I decided to go and have one last look at you. But when from the looks of your face I knew that your heart had changed from gloom to gladness at the sight of me, all my plans fell into chaos. I had *you* to consider. I knew you felt for me as I feel for you. I could not leave you feeling that way, without telling you I was going and why. For you to live in uncertainty, hoping desperately against hope, is a

thing too terrible for me to fasten onto my worst enemy, much less on him whom I love as my own heart.

"When I saw how you looked, it frightened me so that although I sat through the service I was not conscious of anything that was going on."

"When you were a girl, Ethel, you believed the Bible. You were a Christian and really loved the Lord Jesus."

"Yes, I did, and it seemed to me that God was real and that He even answered my girlish prayers. But I have found it was all a mistake. Many things stated in the Bible are contrary to *Nature*, and of course such a thing as that cannot be."

"For you to love a man as you speak of loving me, and yet leave as you have planned doing, is also contrary to Nature. But it is true, is it not?"

"I knew it would be that way. I have often thought of trying to explain to you why the Bible cannot be true, but I have never done it, knowing that you would floor me the first time you spoke. You are the smartest person I have ever met, but I know what I know, even though I am no match for you when it comes to an argument."

"But seriously, Ethel, do you not see that if everything must be according to Nature there is some way out for you? Your nature wants me. I have confessed that mine wants you. There is a way. Come back to your mother's God. Then you will not have to go away from me. If you do not see how you can do this and be honest with yourself, do as the good Lord tells you

and you will *find* the way. He runs His universe according to Nature."

"How does He tell me to find the way as you speak?"

"Jesus said this, Ethel, in John 7:17: 'If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself.' Are you willing to do His will?"

"I am that, surely."

"I am willing to rest the whole case — my life's happiness and yours, on the truth of the verse I have just quoted to you. God will make you to know that the Bible is true. Go to your room. Open at the Gospel of John and read it. If you remain willing to do His will, as you read, you will *know* before you have completed a painstaking reading of that short Gospel, that the Bible is the infallible Word of God."

"It seems to me impossible, Wilmer; but the issues at stake are so vast, and my way before me so dark and forbidding, that I am going to try your plan. I shall not take the train tonight. I will spend the night with John's Gospel. I want to hurry to my room, for some way your confident words have given me just a faint glimmer of hope."

CHAPTER TEN

Wilmer realized that, on the natural plane, he had risked everything he held dear to life on the truth of the assurance he had given Ethel that the verse he had quoted to her was actually and practically true. He knew, though, that really he had assumed no risk. He had taken the only course open to him. He had not asked her to marry him. He was sure, from the clear way in which she had explained the matter, that if he had asked her to marry him she would have refused. She would have felt there was no other course. Moreover, another compelling reason had restrained him from asking her hand in marriage. His purpose was unalterably fixed that he would never knowingly be joined to an unbeliever, and she had declared plainly that that was what she was.

Nevertheless, he actually trembled as he performed his customary duties in preparing for bed. In fact, before he came to undressing he decided that it would be useless for him to lie down. He was too greatly excited to sleep. He would spend the time beseeching his lover Lord to guide the meditations of his soul mate and clear her brain of the worldly-minded unbelief inflicted upon her by her preceptors.

It was a royal battle that had been raging for days in the soul of Ethel Fulbright. She had envisioned herself as watching it rather than engaging in it. She did not clearly see that the contest of which she had deemed herself umpire was a life and death struggle between rival personalities for the possession of her never-dying soul. She did not realize that her deciding the matter one way looked toward her going to the lake of fire, while deciding it the other way would be laying her course for the gates of heaven. So far as the question itself was concerned, she had considered it academic. Deciding one way or the other truly held terrible eventualities as regarded the happiness she craved, but that that decision had to do with her guilt or innocence before God, she had not realized.

The way things had shaped themselves, it was in the superlative degree important that she believe the Bible, because not believing it was the thing that prevented her marrying Wilmer or even remaining in the same city where he was. Her desire to believe the Bible and so be free to marry the man she loved with all the intensity of a great soul, rather than any hope to come into favor with God, was what had sent her hastening to her room. She must come to believe the Bible if possible.

An imponderable mystery conceals the why's and how's of God's dealings with a soul. God is almighty. Satan is one of His creatures, and one day the great God will send forth a mighty angel with a great chain in his hand, who will lay violent hands on the devil and

bind him and cast him into the bottomless pit. God loves the souls of men — loves them with the infinite tenderness that is shown by His offering His only begotten Son to die the death of a malefactor on a Roman cross that they might be saved. Yet God stands with the devil, like one of two suitors contending for the hand of a maid. If the man so being wooed decides to go Satan's way, God, the almighty God, goes away, grieved and disappointed.

In answer to prayer, however, God will move with increased persuasiveness on the mind and heart of the soul in question. He may even appear to the sinner in visible form, as He did to that arrant sinner on the Damascus road long ago. He will bring to the sinner's mind considerations that tend to influence him to decide for God. He will bring back to a fading memory some appropriate text, long forgotten, and make it stand out as if printed in bold lettering not to be overlooked. These are mysteries, but yet they are every-day occurrences.

Wilmer Coltrane was a man of faith. God listened when he prayed. So as he called mightily upon God, asking Him to use every means at His disposal to bring about saving faith in the heart of his beloved, God answered. Ethel's mind became open. Previously she had closed the argument, that is, she had functioned as the umpire of the fight for her soul, deciding for the devil and for unbelief. Now she reconsidered the matter. She threw the contest wide open again. There came strongly before her mind the situation of the girl

who had died in the hospital. That girl's experiences had been like her own. Would she, too, be brought to despair when she saw death approaching, as Alice Throckmorton had been, and send for someone to help her back into the way of faith?

Death was a solemn thing. What was it, anyway? Wilmer had told her years before about the triumphant death of his little mother. What had happened really when Mrs. Coltrane died? Was she dead actually, or was she somewhere waiting for her boy? Ethel had not been taught that there is no hereafter. There *must* be. But if there is a hereafter, it must be different for different people. Could Wilmer, fine and wonderful as she knew him to be, and some evil-hearted men about whom she had read in the papers get to the same place by their widely different modes of life?

Where could the answer to these questions be found? No one knew surely, unless he read it in the Bible. It looks as if the Bible *ought* to be true, if it isn't, for there is no other way to know what it is so essential that we should know. Maybe it *is* true, after all. How do the professors know it is *not* true? How do they know that rising from the dead is contrary to Nature? A dry, dead seed has life in it. Maybe it is only very *unusual* for a dead man to come to life. Who knows? It did seem contrary to Nature for her and Wilmer not to be able to marry when they each wanted to so desperately. He said she could find her way back to her mother's God by reading the Gospel of John, being willing as she did so, to do God's will.

She switched on the light and dug into her trunk for the Bible she had never thrown away. "John, here it is." She would read. "God, help me to get this thing decided right. I am determined to do Your will if I can know what Your will is."

"The Word was God," she read. Curious. What was the Word? A little later, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." That must have been Jesus. Jesus is God! If God wanted to be born without any human father, what would there be that could hinder His doing it? Didn't God make everything and everybody? Surely God could be born without a father if He wanted to — without a mother either for that matter. Why not? Contrary to Nature? Who could be sure of that? Nature was pretty complicated. Men were finding out more and more about Nature all the time. Maybe there is a lot we do not know yet.

After a while, she got to Nicodemus. She read eagerly, like a hound on a fresh trail. Nicodemus was a big man, but he wanted to know how to do so that everything would be all right at the end of life. Jesus told him he must be born again. Queer. Nicodemus couldn't understand it, and she couldn't either. But God said it. Jesus is God. That was plain. He *said* He is, and even the professors had admitted that Jesus was a great, wise, and good man.

"God so loved the world that he gave his Son." That was Jesus, the Son of His Father, God. That was easy. She could understand that all right. God's Son wanted to become a man and did it by being born of a virgin.

What was there wrong about that? That would be easy — for God.

She hurried on. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Ah! There it was. That is what Nicodemus wanted to know. When a baby is born, it dies after a while; but when it believes in Jesus, it has *everlasting* life. To have everlasting life, the once-born must be born again — must be given a different kind of life. How? Why, that was easy, too. It is by believing on the Son. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "I believe on the Son, now that I understand it."

Ethel awoke to the fact that she was happy. The Bible is true. Of course it is. Anyone with half an eye who will read it with an open mind and a willing heart as she had read it, would *know* it is true. Those professors had not read it that way. That was all. They had read it without being willing to do all it said. Why, sure! she could see it as plainly as daylight. She would call Wilmer and tell him.

Springing to her feet, she reached for the 'phone. Glancing at her watch — three o'clock! Where *had* the time gone? Have to wait until morning. That wouldn't be hard to do — not hard like what she had been going through for several days. Maybe she could sleep a little herself. She felt so good. What "silly pates" people are who do not believe the Bible! She yawned. It was noon when she opened her eyes.

Wilmer had quit praying for Ethel. The burden of prayer so heavy upon him when he had first gone to

his room had lifted about midnight, when another thought came into his mind. He could not ask Ethel to marry him even if she did come to believe the Bible. He had no doubt that she would do that, for he had prayed until the lifting of the burden in the way it had done made it sure God had answered.

But he was called of God to be an evangelist. He had not chosen God, but God had chosen him. If he should ask Ethel to marry him, she would expect him to live with her. That would be her right. She wouldn't want to marry a man and then live alone. He had plenty of money, and he could provide for her any kind of home she might wish, but he felt sure she was not at all thinking of that. She wanted *him*, wanted to be *with* him. That could not be. On his side even, why should he marry her, or anyone else for that matter, planning to be away from home all the time?

As these distressing thoughts raced through his distracted mind, he thought of the old saying about "jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire." He had been suffering greatly in the frying-pan of doubt and uncertainty. Now it seemed worse to know he could not marry her because of his *ministry* than being deprived of that pleasure by her *unbelief*. That was a wrong thing, and wrong things could be gotten out of the way. This was a right thing and must not even be prayed about to be removed.

While contending mighty foemen fought grimly for the soul of Ethel Fulbright, the same individuals contended in Wilmer's room for the soul of the young

evangelist. The urge of one contender was, "You have a right to live, to enjoy the comforts of home as other men do." He even quoted Scripture as he had done on another occasion when he had fought for the soul of the Savior. He said: "God tells you in His Word, 'Let the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.' How is Ethel going to obey that Scripture if you will not marry her?" Then the Lord would say, "That is a general rule, but 'I have chosen you and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.' "

It was a great fight. His own natural love, his ardent desire to save Ethel from a life of loneliness, joined forces with Satan on the one side to persuade him. On the other side, his deep love for souls, the knowledge he had from experience that through his labors God would save many, and the vows he had made before God that he would spend his life in His service, were brought forcibly to his mind by the Spirit of God. Finally, peace came. Wilmer reached out his arms as if to another visible in the room, saying, "Your will, Lord, not mine."

He arose from aching knees, undressed, and lay down to sleep. It was three o'clock. It had been a long, dreadful fight, but now it was ended. God's will was always best. God loved him, and everything God wanted him to do was best for him to do.

He closed his eyes to go to sleep. He fell to wondering about Ethel. He wished he could be with her to

help her in *her* fight. But of course he couldn't. He could *never* be with her. When this thought rolled over his soul like some huge Juggernaut crushing all his newly formed purposes, the fight was on again. All over again he had to resist the devil and plead the promises of God, and it was long before he could say again, and really mean it, "Thy will be done, Lord."

When breakfast time came he was sleeping fitfully and called through the closed door that he would not be down. Exhausted Nature demanded rest and, now that at last he had finally said, "Thy will be done," he could sleep, and he did. At one o'clock, having had a good season of prayer, he was just ready to go down when the maid announced that he was wanted on the 'phone.

The moment he heard Ethel's voice his heart leaped for joy for he knew her doubts were gone. Yes, everything was all right. She had got back to her mother's God. The mists had all been driven away. It had been like the glorious rising of the sun after a long, dark, and stormy night. She was happier than she had ever been before. Could he call for her about five so they could go again to Darby's?

When Ethel hung up the receiver and started to write the long, loving letter she was planning to send to her mother, she realized that while Wilmer had rejoiced with her over her return to the fold, as radiantly and whole-heartedly as she had supposed he would, there was nevertheless an indefinable something in his words or tones, she hardly knew which, indicating that things

were not completely as he would have liked. Likely he was in a strait betwixt two, hesitating whether to give up his ministry to make a home for her or give her up for his ministry. He naturally would be thinking such thoughts. That question was certainly on the way and would have to be answered in a manner to please God before they could ever launch their marital ship.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AT DARBY'S that evening the lovers sat again in the same place. The situation they faced was greatly improved. When the sun rises in a clear and cloudless sky after many days of mist and gloom, his glorious shining is much more noticeable than it is when no gloomy days have marred the recent past. Ethel had lived in gloom, surrounded by depressing shadows for years. No wonder things seemed so beautiful, now that the Sun of righteousness had risen in her heart with healing in His wings. The beloved dreams of a lifetime must be given up, but this was a trifle, a mere bagatelle when compared with the priceless worth of the man she loved.

Wilmer was very grateful to God for having brought back his beloved into the faith, and he smiled at her and rejoiced with her most warmly. But his heart was very heavy because of the deathblow he was intending to give to her hopes of marrying him. The fact that the same blow would mean death to his own life's happiness added to the grief he nobly tried to conceal. Let her be happy in her anticipation of wedded bliss as long as possible. It was wonderful to have her look at him across the table the way she did. He would not

do a thing to change her joy into gloom until he had to.

"Well, Wilmer, darling," she cooed as the pink flush on her cheeks made her even more lovely than before— "I am going to treat myself to the luxury of calling you that, feeling sure that you know it properly represents the love I have for you."

"My precious darling," he caressed, at which the color deepened in her cheeks and rose to her temples, but her eyes held his without wavering. She had meant everything her loving words could carry.

"I was just starting to say, when your delightful vocal caress stopped me, that three astonishing miracles were wrought in my life last night. Is that not something to say?"

"It is, surely, but I know of only one. Tell me quickly so I can rejoice with you — darling."

"The time will come, Wilmer, Sweetheart, when you cannot say a thing like that without having to prove your words with a kiss. Now, however, I shall have to excuse you."

"To know you want to kiss me, Precious, is wonderfully sweet, but in view of those who might look—"

"Three miracles, I said — three. God miraculously changed my painstakingly-arrived-at conviction that the Bible is not trustworthy. That was a miracle of parts. He filled my heart, for years the abode of gloom and sadness, with joy too great to be described. That is a miracle, I say. He made me look upon the sacrifice of my life's dream of working as a certified public ac-

countant as a trivial thing of small importance. Maybe that is the greatest miracle of the three."

"I understand the first and the second, Ethel, and I rejoice with you. But the third—I am in the dark."

"When the proper time comes, Wilmer, and you ask me to marry you, I am going to say a glad and eager, 'Yes.' But before that proper time comes, I have things to do. Now and always I shall have to recognize the prior claim that Another has on your life. Since the experience of last night, I could by no means get the consent of my mind for you to marry a public accountant. The only woman He whose prior claim on you I must not ignore will approve of your marrying is one who can and will help you in carrying on the work He gave you to do. You see that, I am sure. I went to school and fitted myself to do public accounting before I undertook to put anyone's books to rights. Now I must go to school and fit myself to be the worthy assistant of the man who is chosen by God to be an evangelist."

Wilmer's eyes shone with a new luster. The darkness and gloom that had so oppressed him vanished. The hindrance over which he had fought through the long night and for which he had not even thought of a way of deliverance had vanished.

"O Ethel, my soul's mate! How good God is! Throughout the night I experienced the greatest temptation I have ever faced. I was tempted to ask you to marry me and then settle down with you in a home my ample funds would enable us to plan and build.

I *wanted* to do it, oh, so badly! But finally, by God's grace, I gained the victory, and came here tonight fully determined to let you know in some way that we could never be anything more than friends. I knew my ministry must come first, and to be true to it I must break your heart and my own. Now I am ashamed to think that I fought so against God. He was intending all the time to give you to me, while I thought He meant to deny me my heart's longing."

"I knew all about it, Wilmer. When I talked with you over the 'phone I knew your heart was sick, and I surmised that was the reason. I have been seeing the ache in your heart, visible in your precious eyes, ever since we have been sitting here tonight. I knew the genuineness of your love for God, and I felt sure you would take the view of your duty that you did take. This made it perfectly plain to me that my days as a certified public accountant are numbered. I shall be more profitably and more happily employed rescuing men and women from lives of sin."

"Ethel! How precious you are! How good God is! I have needed an assistant, a confidante, someone to help me pray through difficult situations. I have tried several men who undertook to assist me, but I did not find them willing to hang on in prayer until the break came. They were looking this way and that at the girls, too. So I have been going on alone. How good God is!"

"Expert accounting, Wilmer, is not to be mentioned in the same day with the work of saving men from sin,

if the comparative importance of the two callings is in mind. Now, I shall not permit you to take me on until I have shown distinguished ability as an evangelist's helper. No doubt that has a decidedly queer sound; but I mean it, even though naturally nothing else could please me so well as to marry you tonight. I am going to *prove* that I can help an evangelist in his work effectively. When I have, Precious light-o'-my-life, I shall wait with outstretched arms for you to come bounding over the hills to claim me as your bride."

"Ethel! You darling! I already love you to distraction, but you are making me look upon you as God's divinely perfect gift to me. I foresee the very high esteem in which people will hold you, and this, too, will give me extreme satisfaction."

"Now, Wilmer, there is one more thing in the nature of business for us to transact before giving ourselves over to undisguised love and admiration for each other. Let us get that out of the way, and then we can just sit and feast on each other's sweetness with the consciousness that nothing has been overlooked or neglected."

"That sounds delightful, Ethel; but what other business can there be?"

"It will not do for me to hang around your meetings, helping you. We must remember that we live in a very wicked world and that people will not understand the purity of our purposes. I must find a woman evangelist whose methods are as nearly like yours as possible, and join myself to her, while I pray and try and study

and learn to be a soul-winner *par excellence.* Do you know such a woman?"

"Beautiful thought, Ethel. Worthy of my precious love. There *is* such a woman. She is fine. I have often thought of asking her to marry me and work together, but you always got in the way. Just when I would be almost persuaded, for she *is* very fine, I would get to comparing her with you, and then I would decide to go on alone. Her name is Jennie Sloan. She is to begin a meeting tomorrow at Caruthersville."

"Nuf sed, my precious. I shall be leaving tonight for Caruthersville. I am in desperate haste to begin my schooling, for I will never marry a man with whom I cannot carry my end of the load."

"I believe I might look the world over and not find another woman so lovely and wise and self-sacrificing as my darling wife-to-be. Of course there will be nothing to hinder our corresponding, and I can tell you such things as I may think of. My precious one! Three things come to mind at once. You will need to know the Bible; need to be so filled with the Spirit that you will truly love the unlovely; and you will need to learn by practice how to use the Bible to bring men to repentance. Do you remember how God blessed John 7:17 to you through my prescribing?"

"I shall not forget that, Wilmer. Your plan seemed such a forlorn hope, but that there was something that held out *any* hope, made me eager to try it."

On the train rushing through the night Ethel knew she was a happy woman. The experience was so novel

that she fairly hugged herself with delight. She had no doubt that God would enable her to fit herself to be Wilmer's wife. So that was settled, and she was as good as married to the finest, wisest, and most kingly man she had ever met. She was at peace with God. If everything else had been awry, that would have made her happy notwithstanding.

Arriving at Caruthersville, Ethel engaged board and room at Mrs. Smedley's. Yes, Mrs. Smedley knew where Miss Sloan could be found. At first it had been thought that the church would entertain her at Mrs. Smedley's, but finally it was decided to have her stop at the Franklin house. Was Miss Fulbright acquainted with Sister Sloan? No? Unusual for a young woman just come to town to inquire for a lady evangelist. No, Mrs. Smedley wasn't a Christian exactly, but she believed in it. It was a fine thing if one could only live it. She had so many trials and torments she was sure she could never live up to it. She wouldn't make a mock of religion by joining church and then failing to live the life. Yes, one time she had professed religion, but that was a long time ago, before she had so many temptations. Yes, she should like to be prayed for.

Told at the desk that Jennie Sloan's room was No. 317 and that the evangelist had just gone up, Ethel rapped on the door and when it was opened she looked into as friendly a pair of blue-gray eyes as she had ever seen. Jennie Sloan was evidently a splendid specimen of young womanhood. It was plain that for the

evangelist to smile was the most natural thing in the world. Her voice was clear, deep, and pleasing. She was well tailored and neat in appearance.

"I am Ethel Fulbright, Sister Sloan. I have just come to town. I have been going to school most of my life but now I am looking for a location, and I came to Caruthersville expressly to see you. I have some things I should like to say to you which are important to me, and they may prove important to you also."

"Sounds interesting, Miss Fulbright. Come in and be seated."

"I have no skill in diplomacy, Sister Sloan; a woman of simple mind and plain speech. I shall come at once to the gist of the matter, although what I have to say is so private and personal in its nature that you may consider it amazing that I should speak so to a stranger. This is the thing — I am in love with a young evangelist. I am sure he will propose marriage to me if I give him a chance. I am holding him off because I can see that it would not be pleasing to God for him to marry any woman unless she could help him, or at the very least, not hinder him in his noble calling. I told a minister friend of mine what I am telling you and asked for the name of some woman evangelist whom I could follow around and by helping her, learn to be an efficient evangelist's helper. He gave me your name, and I have come to tell you that I am going to help you in this revival."

"You have a remarkable way of speaking, Miss Ful-

bright. I am not looking for an evangelist's helper." Jennie Sloan spoke with some asperity.

"No one, I am sure, can object to being helped. Your mind, of course, naturally turns to the matter of my remuneration and to the effect on your work of your acknowledging me as your assistant. I brush those objections out of your way. I want no remuneration. I want no more recognition than your own natural good judgment and God-guided sense of Christian propriety may induce you to accord me. I do not even expect you to recognize me personally in the public service when you meet me. I shall pay my own way fully.

"I have no one to vouch for my Christian character for the simple reason that I have been a Christian less than two days. So I shall attend your services as a stranger and not embarrass you by intimating to anyone that there is any understanding between us.

"If in the course of time you see fit to call on me for any assistance, I shall gladly do what I can. If you do not I shall still pursue my studies, trying as hard as a woman can to become all that an efficient evangelist's helper should be. Can you think of any reason why I should not pursue the course I have outlined to you, Sister Sloan? I am intending to follow you to your next appointment and work there for the success of your meeting just as I shall do here."

"That is the most amazing speech I have ever heard, Miss Fulbright. The way you put it, I cannot lose anything, but probably will be put to an advantage somewhat by your efforts. I should, however, for my own

satisfaction like to have you give me the names of some people to whom I could write inquiring about your *moral* character, even though they may know nothing of your being a Christian."

"Fine, Sister Sloan. I am a graduate of the Compton University in Chicago, holding the degree of C.P.A. So I shall give you the names of Karl Taylor Compton, President, Walter Humphreys, Secretary, and Horace Sayford Ford, Treasurer."

"Strange, Miss Fulbright, passing strange, that a lady with the ample resources I surmise you have, and a liberal education, should make me such a proposition. I shall write today to the men whose names you have given me. Until I hear from them, I shall withhold judgment. Surely I cannot object to your helping in the meetings in the way you have outlined, but I must be excused from acknowledging, at least for the present, that there is any understanding between us."

As Ethel arose to go, the evangelist said, "Shall we have a word of prayer before you go?"

Instantly falling on her knees, Ethel waited until Miss Sloan had presented the strange situation to the Lord and had asked for His blessing on the stranger and guidance as to what position she, the evangelist, should permit the stranger to take. Then Ethel prayed: "Lord, I must have love for the lost souls of men and women that exceeds my love for anything else but Thee. Please shed such a love abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost given to me.

"Please give me favor with the sinners I talk to,

so that I may be able to draw them to Christ. Show me how I can make myself so useful to Sister Sloan that she will consider me indispensible. I come in Jesus' name, and so expect an answer. I thank Thee for it. Amen."

"You speak to the Lord, Miss Fulbright, in a way to make one think you feel very intimately acquainted with Him, yet you tell me you were converted only very recently. It is surprising."

"He is very real to me. I ought to add to my former statement that as a child I knew the Lord and relied upon Him for guidance in difficult situations. It was my preceptors in the academy who destroyed my confidence in the Bible and so wrecked my life spiritually. All things work together for good to people like me, and I expect what the professors did will be an advantage. I can see that my experience will enable me to understand the position of other young people whose faith has been wrecked in school and perhaps accomplish their resuscitation when no one else could.

"I am going now, Sister Sloan. Whatever closeness of relation comes about between us will result from advances *you* make. I shall make none, as I recognize the delicacy of your situation and how you will feel about a woman with no recommendations who outlines such a strange and anomalous plan as I have."

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN Ethel left Jennie Sloan's room, she went at once to a job printer's shop. Back in her own room, she settled herself to think and pray. She must have a great love for the souls of men. The men themselves might be very unlovely, but she must yearn over them as a loving mother does over her seriously sick child. She must love them so truly and deeply that, no matter what they do or say, she would still yearn over them with tender love and compassion. She couldn't get into this frame of mind by direct effort. God would have to put this love into her heart. She could, however, she believed, by pondering long and deeply over the future to which any sinner is hastening, come to experience a natural feeling of compassion for all sinners. Compassion is closely akin to love.

"God, give me the love for sinners that Jesus has," she prayed. "Give me wisdom to approach them successfully. When I am speaking to them, I intend to rely on Thee. Please give me the right words."

At the supper table, Ethel met Sarah Thompson, a tall, bony-faced woman of about Ethel's age. After supper, Miss Thompson said, "Let's sit on the porch and talk a while. You are a stranger in town?"

"Just came in this morning."

"Single?"

"Surely. You are unmarried, too, being here?"

"Never been able to wangle a proposal out of any worth-while fellow yet. Men like fair women. That is out of my line."

Miss Thompson spoke with more acerbity than the occasion demanded, Ethel thought. She judged that the failure recently of some marriage plan still rankled. Miss Thompson continued: "I suppose it is hardly worth my time asking, you being single, whether you have your life insured?"

"Do you sell life insurance?"

"That is my line. What is yours?"

"I am hoping to be an insurance saleswoman, but I have not started out yet, really. My heart is in the work. It seems to me it must be wonderful to get an uninsured man safely landed with his name on the dotted line, premium paid, and the policy delivered."

"Well, if the policy is large enough to give a good sized commission, I might call it 'wonderful,' as you say, but thus far I have not landed one large enough to get excited over. What company are you thinking of working for?"

"The Eternal Life Unlimited. A man who keeps his policy alive in that company to the end of his days is guaranteed perfect happiness with every need met forever. I am just about to start out looking for prospects. It seems to me it will make me glad all over if I can write someone."

"You must be stringing me, Miss Fulbright. I never heard of that company, but *any* company that undertakes to guarantee anyone forever must be a fraudulent concern."

"I didn't mean to appear to speak trivially, Miss Thompson. I only meant to say that I am hoping to induce some sinner to accept the safety that Jesus gives to those who trust Him."

"Ha! You caught me off guard. Pretty good, Miss Fulbright. It *is* a fine company and, as you say, to insure someone in it is wonderful. But how are you going to get enough commissions to keep on being well dressed?"

"I haven't given that a thought as yet. I believe it will come out all right, though. But I was not jesting when I answered you as I did. It seems to me there must be a great similarity between the methods that succeed in your business and in mine. Seriously, I want to learn everything I possibly can about how to get men saved. Would you please tell me how you go about getting prospects and when you get one how do you get him insured?"

"Are you really serious? Do you mean you would like me to tell you as if you didn't know, how to write life insurance, so you can adapt the information to evangelism?"

"There is nothing else I am so eager to know as that very thing. I shall listen to what you say with avidity."

"It is very simple. Ponder over a family man's dying without insurance, leaving his wife and kids in want.

Think of it until you can feel for those bereaved ones — really *feel* for them. Know the good points that recommend your policy. Use your wits and your finest manner in striking up an acquaintance with persons who *should* insure, and then be in dead earnest, trying to interest them and to get their names on the dotted line

"That is all, except one thing, the most important thing of all — keep at work. Do a day's work every day. In the morning, see someone. Stick to him until you succeed or fail, and then see another. Keep this up eight or nine hours a day, and if you have a good proposition, you will make plenty of sales.

"Come to think of it, it *does* look as if those same things might make a woman a success in getting sinners saved."

"How do you find out whether they are already insured or not?"

"I ask them, if I can do no better. But if I can find out about any man before I see him, I do it. Often someone else can give me the information."

At the close of the next day, Ethel wrote to Wilmer:

"My Precious:

"This ends the first full day I have spent in Caruthersville. This is my first report. Kindly scrutinize it and make such suggestions as you may think I need.

"I began taking music lessons today, both piano and voice. I had a couple of cards printed. The yellow one, as you see, reads, 'He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry' (Isa. 30:19). The white

one reads, 'Ethel Fulbright, Lover of Souls. Attend the Sloan meeting now in progress in the city.'

"I have had a delightful time today during the four hours I have assigned myself for personal work every day. I shall go everywhere that I can find women or children idle. When I see a woman who seems to have nothing special on hand, I walk up to her and smilingly hand her a yellow card. I have handed a yellow card to twenty-eight women today, and every one of them when I did it read the inscription and then turned the card over. Seeing the other side blank, she turned it back and read again what was printed on it. Then, as if puzzled, she looked up at me.

"Then I would say, 'It is my way of introducing myself.' Handing her one of the white cards, I would continue: 'I am Miss Fulbright. I am greatly interested in people's souls. May I inquire whether *you* have cried to God and found Him gracious?'

"From then on, the conversations differed. Some were glad to talk; others frowningly said it was none of my business. Others would answer in the negative. No matter what answer I received, I would keep perfectly sweet and say the thing that seemed most likely to meet the need.

"When I had talked with about a dozen women with varying slight success, I approached a woman three or four years older than myself. When she looked up at me after reading the card twice, I told her my name and my object in accosting her. She asked rather belligerently, 'Are you trying to be a preacher?'

" 'Oh, no,' I smiled. 'I hold the degree of Certified Public Accountant. You look as if you might hold some degree.'

" 'What school?' she asked, seeming to warm to me perceptibly.

" 'Compton,' I said.

" 'Great school!' she exclaimed. 'I got the same degree, class of '33. I am Josephine Garby. But how did you get through all the schooling you did and still feel like talking to anyone about crying to God and finding Him gracious? The academy got all of that out of me. Didn't they get it out of you?'

"Then, Wilmer, we got down to business. We talked. We went and sat down and talked and talked. I told her of my girlhood experience with God and of the destruction of my faith by the professors. Then I told her about you and the text you gave me. I told her of my gloom and dark unbelief as I began to read John's Gospel, determined to do everything that I saw to be God's will.

"She had no love affair that was being wrecked by her unbelief, but she knew she was breaking her old mother's heart and she hated herself for her skepticism but had never seen any way to change. She couldn't tell her mother she believed the Bible when she didn't, and she was very sad over it. My experience seemed to give her a great boost upwards. I gave her a Gospel of John and she started off, hotfoot, to her room to see if doing as I had done would result in changing her heart beliefs as it had mine. I am confidently expecting

God to answer prayer for her and bring her back to her mother's God, the Savior of her girlhood days.

"There are a number of other more or less hopeful prospects among the women I have seen today, and some of them I am confident will attend the meeting tonight. I shall sit near the door where I can see everyone as she comes in, and I hope to assist some of them in reaching the conclusion to forsake sin.

"My first day spent as a worker together with God has given me deep satisfaction, and great hopes for a roseate future are taking form in my soul.

"This is a report, not a love letter. I intend to send others as interesting things take place. I love you, Wilmer.

"Ethel"

How strange it seemed that anyone so wonderful as Ethel Fulbright should be taking the humble place of a learner, striving to make herself fit to be *his* wife! How precious it was of her to be willing to do such a thing! Anyone else would have wanted him to marry her, merely *hoping* that she would prove an efficient helper or even without once thinking whether she *could* help. It must be that the Lord had a part in arranging his future so delightfully. How, otherwise, could it be explained that Ethel without even a suggestion from him had perceived that he could not, consistently with his heavenly calling, marry a woman with any sort of occupation independent of the ministry?

She had not only seen this truth that almost anyone else would surely have overlooked, but without hesita-

tion she had given up the dreams of her life, the highly treasured aims for which she had spent large sums of money and weary years of lonely effort in equipping herself. Would she tire of the new work at which she was now a novice? Out of sight of him, would she return to her day-dreams about expert public accounting for great firms and decide that the price she was voluntarily paying for him was too high? Maybe so. Perhaps it was even probably so. It was too much to expect of anyone that she would be willing to make so radical a change in her long-pondered, well-developed plans for her life. She might even be tempted to leave her newly begun service of God.

If so, he must have fortitude enough to go on. It would be harder, he thought, than going to the stake as many other men had done, allowing their flesh to be scorched and their lives snuffed out by the leaping flames rather than to go contrary to the will of God. But he could do it, and he would. Moreover, those martyrs had gone out of their fiery ordeal to meet their Lord with smile-wreathed faces. He would do no less. By the grace of God, no one should ever see him bemoaning his fate. "As for God, his ways are right." Thinking these thoughts, he composed his letters to Ethel with a reserve that he hoped she would not notice but which he believed his somewhat uncertain position called for, instead of fully following his heart's leadings.

One day the postman left a letter for Wilmer which, when he saw it, he knew was from Jennie Sloan. The letter contained the following paragraphs:

"About five months ago, when I was in Caruthersville, a young woman named Fulbright made me the most amazing proposition I had ever heard. She came entirely without recommendations and announced that she was going to help me in the meeting. When I bristled a little at the seeming impertinence of such words, she smilingly brushed aside my objections by saying that she was in love with an evangelist and expected him to ask her to marry him. But, she said, before she allowed him to do that she felt that she must demonstrate to herself at least, that she would be an efficient assistant in his work for the Lord.

"She said my name had been given her by a preacher friend of hers, and that she had come to be my assistant for the purpose of learning the art of helping in a meeting. She said she would expect no pay, would meet her own expenses, would not expect me to announce her as a helper, and would not embarrass me by letting anyone know that there was any understanding between her and me.

"Of course I could not object to anyone's helping me on those terms, and I told her so. She gave me the names of three important men whom she said would vouch for her integrity, and I wrote to them. They gave her a fine reputation as an upright young woman of unquestioned moral soundness.

"She is still following me about from place to place, and I have come highly to appreciate her. She is here with me now, in my room. I lean on her heavily. I no longer hesitate to announce her as my

assistant, and her platform work, while not outstanding, is satisfactory. I am soon to lose her, she says. She thinks it will not be long until she will feel justified in encouraging her lover to ask her hand in marriage.

"Doesn't that all sound like a page out of a novel? She is the most successful person I have ever seen in contacting strangers on the street, one by one. I shall miss her sadly."

When Wilmer had hastily scanned this part of Jennie Sloan's letter, he danced about his room in wild enthusiasm of joy. To think that Jennie Sloan, whom he believed was hoping he would ask her to marry him, of all women, should give him this most welcome information!

Wilmer kept carefully in mind the date when the six months Ethel had given herself would end. If he were going to become engaged to her in a grown-up and final way, he did not want to be carrying the responsibility of a revival-meeting when he did it. To enter into such a momentous agreement was a tremendous thing to do.

A few weeks after he received the letter from Jennie Sloan, he wrote to Ethel that he had decided to take a short rest after closing this meeting and that in a little over a week he planned to leave for a short visit to his old and true friends, the Kestersons.

"The six months of your self-imposed training," he wrote, "is about out, and if you decide at its close to make your precious mother a visit, you will not be far from the Kesterson home. I am looking forward

with much pleasure to seeing you again after our half a year of separation."

When Wilmer had closed his meeting and was ready to take the train for Clinton, he received a bulky letter addressed in a familiar hand. Hurriedly breaking the seal, he read:

"Darling:

"I love you. The six months of my probation, the winter of my discontent, is coming to an end. I appreciate very highly your thought of taking a rest between your meetings just now. Hope has sustained me wonderfully all these months, and it leaps a little higher when I construe your action to mean that when in your maturity you formally ask me the question we had in mind when we were children, you want to be free to give me your full and undivided attention. Your making this decision proves to me anew your superlative excellence.

"At the end of tomorrow, my six months will have passed, and then I expect to leave for Clinton. Until then, good-by.

"Ethel"

Enclosed with Ethel's letter were three others. The first one he opened was in the familiar hand of his girl friend, Jennie Sloan. It read:

"To an Unknown, Fortunate Gentleman:

"Ethel Fulbright has been with me the past six months as evangelist's helper. The last four months I have gladly advertised her as my assistant. I waited

two months after she began helping me before doing this, because she carried no credentials, and the proposal she had made me seemed so remarkable.

"She has made herself indispensable to me. Her work on the platform, her congregational fishing, and best of all, her indefatigable person-to-person daytime work, has resulted, I believe, in doubling the effectiveness of my ministry. She started out, she said, to become an efficient lay helper for an evangelist. She said she was in love with you, and wanted to make herself fit to be your wife, believing that you were ready to carry out the arrangement between you made in your youth by asking her hand in marriage.

"She has steadfastly refused to tell me your name or anything about you, but whoever you are, if you are worthy of her, it is saying a great deal for you.

"Extending heartfelt congratulations, I am,

"Yours faithfully,

"Jennie Sloan, Evangelist"

Three other letters from as many pastors whom Ethel had served as assistant to Jennie Sloan were also enclosed. The writers sang her praises, each in his own way, as loudly as did the evangelist herself, and each complimented the unknown man to whom they were writing on his extraordinary good fortune when he should secure such a splendid co-worker in the form of a wife.

"Well, Wilmer, my dear boy," sparkled Mr. Henshaw as Wilmer entered the bank, "I am *glad* to see you."

"I am very, very glad to look into *your* face again. Remember when you went part way with me, and how sad we each felt that time when I was celebrating my fourteenth birthday by leaving everything and everybody that I held dear?"

"I do remember, Wilmer. Some people might have said I did an underhanded trick in helping a boy to leave home, but my conscience has been clear and the sequel has demonstrated the wisdom of our action."

"I was fourteen then, and now I shall soon be twenty-five. Then I was looking for some woman to take me in, and in answer to prayer I found her. Mr. and Mrs. Kesterson were excellent substitutes for a real father and mother. A lot of water has run under the bridge since then. I have come to tell you again, as I told you then, that I am leaving to find a woman who will take me in. I do not need a mother now so much, but I *am* looking for a wife."

"Well, boy, it is the way of the world. It is a good way, too. I can remember, vividly, the time when I started over to the home where she lived who is now my wife. Almost fifty years of happiness have followed that eventful day."

"I have given up my lifetime dream of building bridges, Mr. Henshaw. At Clinton I became acquainted with Ethel Fulbright. I loved her. I left her to go to the academy where I lost my faith in Christ. Ethel and I quit writing to each other for a long time. When I was in Metropolis, she was there working as a certified public accountant. She, too, had lost her faith

but while she was there the Holy Spirit brought back to her the joy of her salvation. I found that she had loved me and me alone through the years, just as I had her.

"She insisted, however, that before I gave her the opportunity to become my wife, she must fit herself to carry her end of the load as the wife of an evangelist. She gave up her highly paid profession and set out to fit herself to be an efficient evangelist's assistant. I am on my way now to ask her to marry me. I am telling you first, my oldest and best friend."

"I am highly honored, Wilmer. I congratulate you on your prospect of having for a wife a woman who has displayed the solid horse-sense Ethel Fulbright has shown. Almost any other woman, it seems to me, would have been willing for you to ask her hand in marriage at once and trust to luck the matter of her becoming an efficient helper. The ministry is a highly specialized calling, and she showed extraordinary wisdom and self-control in thus making it sure that by marrying her you would in no way interfere with the success of your ministry. Nothing, nothing whatever must be allowed to slow up the pace of a man whom God has called out of the ordinary walks of life and sent forth to preach His Gospel."

"Ethel and I both see it just as you do, Mr. Henshaw. I may bring her down to see you in a day or so. I want you to see her. She is something extra."

Wilmer's next call was on Carrie, dear old Carrie, who had stood by him faithfully in the time of his

great distress. He had sent her money frequently, all through the years, but Carrie could not write and he had heard very little from her.

"'Fo de Lawd, ef it ain't Mist' Wilmer. I sho is glad to see you, Honey Boy. How big you is growed!"

Taking the ebony face between his two hands, Wilmer planted a kiss on her forehead.

"I am mighty glad to see you, Carrie. You don't seem much older. Are you well and happy?"

"O Lambie! I couldn't be no happier, noways. Every time I get the money from you I'd take the check to Mr. Henshaw and he'd get the money for me. He's the bes' man! I works a little for folks, an' I has a fine gahden. I sho' is glad to see you so big and fine lookin'!"

"I think I am going to get married soon, Carrie. I am on my way to see the lady now, and ask her to marry me. I hope she will. If she does, I am going to bring her to see you. Good-by, Carrie. I hope to see you again soon."

As he shook hands heartily with the happy-faced woman, he left a ten-dollar bill in her hand.

"Bress youh precious haht, Lambie!" she exclaimed, and Wilmer saw the glad tears starting down her cheeks.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE cows in the pastures were beginning to work their way toward the barn, and field hands were casting occasional speculative glances at the sun, thinking of quitting time, when Wilmer stopped his car a hundred yards beyond the Kesterson gate, where it could not be seen from the house. Making his way leisurely to the back door, he rapped, and when Mrs. Kesterson stood before him, he said, "Could yez give a hungry man a job of work to do for a bite to ate, Lady?"

She looked him up and down, observing his excellent clothes and well-groomed appearance, in astonishment. His politely spoken request did not harmonize with his appearance. Suspicion stirring in her, she looked closely into his face, then, "Wilmer Coltrane! As I'm alive! Come right in, Wilmer. Daddy," she called, "here is Wilmer. May I kiss you, Wilmer? Oh, I am so glad to see you looking so fine and clean. You have kept your soul clean, boy. I am so glad."

After a while Mr. Kesterson asked irrelevantly, "How did you get here, Wilmer? You don't look as if you had walked far. I remember the first time I ever saw you, that night when I came in from the barn and found

you here looking so forlorn and scared. You have changed a lot since then, boy."

When the car was safely parked by the big red barn and supper was over, Wilmer said, "I have some very important business to transact tonight, and I may be out late. May I creep in as I used to do and get to bed without waking anyone?"

"You are welcome to try, Wilmer. The front door will not be locked. But I presume you will not succeed any better now than you did long ago. I would hear your almost noiseless movements and say to Daddy with satisfaction, 'Our boy is in, Daddy.' He will be glad to hear me say that again tonight, won't you, Daddy?"

"I don't know what I could hear you say that would listen better," Mr. Kesterson smiled. "I may not need to hear you say it though. I have an idea I shall be so excited I shall hear him myself."

"I am in love with a girl, Mother Kesterson. She and I went to school together in Clinton. I am going over and call on her tonight, and I may get up the courage to ask her to marry me. That is the business that takes me away from your hospitable home."

"Fine, Wilmer! We will have special prayer, asking God to bless you and give you favor in the lady's eyes. I wonder if we know her?"

"No doubt. She is Ethel Fulbright."

"Oh, do tell! I don't know a sweeter or better girl anywhere."

The door of the Fulbright home was opened by an

elderly lady. Wilmer instantly recognized her from the resemblance she bore to Ethel.

"Mrs. Fulbright," he saluted. "I am Wilmer Coltrane. I have called to see Miss Ethel."

Keen old eyes looked into his an instant, gazing, as it seemed to him on his naked soul. The lady displayed no surprise, from which fact Wilmer felt assured his coming was not unexpected. After the instant's pause, while she evidently appraised this stranger who was bent on carrying off her heart's dearest treasure, she smiled a little. Her rose-petal cheeks seemed to the young man to glow slightly, with pleasure, he fondly hoped.

"Come right in, Mr. Coltrane. I believe Ethel half expected you tonight. Have a seat. I shall call her."

He had not long to wait. Almost at once Ethel came in, her arm around her mother's waist.

"So glad to see you, Wilmer," she twinkled. "Mother, this is Mr. Coltrane. Wilmer, allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Fulbright. I wanted Mother to see what a delightful friend the Lord has given me. Let's sit down and talk. Mother, will you stay?"

"I feel sure you children will not need any assistance from me, so I will run along. If either of you come to the place where you feel the need of my advice, call me. I shall be glad to help you."

"A very gracious and timely thing for you to say, Mrs. Fulbright. On my part, I thank you, and I shall not forget."

"How very long it has seemed, Ethel. The months

have dragged themselves along as slowly as the shadows creep at the set of sun. But now, looking back, the time seems short."

"It has seemed the same to me, Wilmer. It is that way with life. The days of a man's life pass along so slowly, but as he glimpses them in retrospect, he feels that the years have fairly flown."

"But now that this period of your self-imposed probation has passed, and I plan to utter the most momentous words of my life, I feel frightened. I love you, Ethel. I have told you this often before, but I repeat it now as the proper prelude to the question, 'Will you marry me?' Do you still love me, Ethel? You confessed to me once since we were grown that you did, and you have written it. Do you love me now?"

"I do, Wilmer. How could I help it? I couldn't. I wish we might never have to be separated again."

Reverently their arms closed about each other. Reverently willing lips clung and sealed for time and eternity the covenant between them.

After a while he said: "Let us go and tell Mother. *Your* mother is the only mother I have. I want to tell her and receive her blessing."

"Mrs. Fulbright," he said as side by side they stood before the older woman, "Ethel has confessed her love for me, and we want to get married. I have loved her for years. She is the only woman I have ever loved. I have never even kept steady company with any other. I will treat her the best I can. I can and will give her everything she wants that money can buy, for

God has blessed me with plenty. May we have your blessing?"

"I could wish I had had an opportunity to know you better, Wilmer, before having to take the momentous step you ask me to take, but ideal situations do not often present themselves. Take her, boy, and may God keep each of you faithful."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fulbright. May I call you 'Mother,' and may I kiss you?"

When he released her, Mrs. Fulbright said, "You are a fine boy, Wilmer. I am glad you are the one to lead my darling baby to the altar. May God bless you both."

"Before today, Mother, I have kissed but one woman's lips — those of my precious young mother, who died in my boyhood. This, however, it seems, has been a famous day for that happy exercise, for today I have kissed the black forehead of Carrie, my old black mammy who has loved me all my life, and who stood valiantly by me when I was sorely tried and almost without friends. When I got to Mother Kesterson's this afternoon she thought it right that we should kiss each other. Then a few minutes ago Ethel had the same conviction. You will, therefore, I hope, in view of my inexperience, excuse any awkwardness you may have noticed."

The next day, when Wilmer and Ethel walked into Mr. Henshaw's office in the Merchants and Planters Bank, after the introductions, the older man said: "May God's richest blessings rest on you both, my children. I have thought about Wilmer for many years as I

should have thought, it seems to me, of a real son had God ever blessed me with one. Now I am glad to broaden the place he has in my heart enough to let you in, Ethel."

"Thank you, Mr. Henshaw. I shall try to be worthy of the great honor you pay me."

"Ethel has heard a lot about you, Mr. Henshaw. I have often told her of all your goodness to me, experienced at many times through the years."

"Is the wedding day fixed?"

"In a way it is, Mr. Henshaw; yes. Ethel and I are each so deeply interested in getting people to accept Christ that it has seemed to us to be the proper thing that we hold a meeting together here in Parsons while we are waiting. We have agreed that I buy a tent and equip my car with a loud speaker. I shall be back here in a few days to make all preliminary arrangements and put up the tent. When everything is ready, Ethel and her mother will come and we shall carry on the meeting here where we can have you near us. On the closing night of this meeting, we plan to be married in the presence of the many Parsons friends we believe the Lord will by that time have given us."

"I must take this opportunity, Ethel," Mr. Henshaw complimented, "to praise you. I know Wilmer has a large bump of practical good sense, and now that you have agreed on this meeting plan, I see that *you* have the same kind of good judgment. We have but one chance to live our lives. You and Wilmer will never live the next month but once. Surely God will be

pleased to see you living it seriously, with a view to forwarding the interests of His kingdom."

When Wilmer stopped his car before the humble home of black Carrie, a great surge of deep satisfaction swept over him. Ethel was just as delighted to call on Carrie as she had been to visit the rich and dignified Mr. Henshaw. How fortunate he felt himself to be! How God had blessed him after his years of unbelief in which he had so sorely grieved the heart of his Lord! God, he knew, is no respecter of persons. The poor and the rich, the black and the white, are all equally precious to God. To see in his darling wife-to-be the mind that was in Christ, gave him great happiness.

"Well, Carrie," he said as the black face appeared in the open doorway, "I have come back, as I said, to show you the lady who has consented to be my wife. Carrie, this is Miss Fulbright. Darling, this is my old mammy, Carrie."

"So glad to see you, Carrie. Wilmer has had much to say about how you have loved him all through the years of his life."

Speechless with joy and astonishment while she was being introduced, Carrie at last found her voice.

"She is wonderful, Lambie, just as you said. I'm so very glad for bofe of you. I was afraid Wilmer never could find anyone worthy of him, but I believes he has."

"I am an evangelist, Carrie," Wilmer said as they were about ready to leave. "In a few days I am going to get a tent and stretch it here. Then Ethel and her

mother will come, and together we shall hold a revival-meeting. You will want to attend, and we shall appreciate your prayers."

"That we shall, Carrie," Ethel agreed. "We want you to help all you can as we try to get men saved. It is a dreadful, dreadful thing for anyone to go out to meet God without having made Christ his friend."

"Ain' it t' trufe?"

"I think she is just fine, Wilmer," Ethel confided as they drove away. "I don't wonder you felt like kissing her, as you told of having done."

"The salt of the earth. Her skin is black, but surely her heart has been washed as white as snow in the blood of the Lamb."

"I am going to cultivate her acquaintance a little when we get back to Parsons to hold the meeting. I want to draw from her the whole story of the way you were treated in your stepmother's home. By the way, let us drive by her home now. I should like to see it."

As the car neared the house, Ethel said, "Is that she? What a forbidding appearance she presents! Oh, I wish she knew our God. He could bear her burdens for her. Shall we not stop and speak to the poor old thing?"

"Good evening, Mother," Wilmer called smilingly as he got out of the car. "My girl friend feels interested in you. She wants to meet you. Ethel, allow me to introduce Mrs. Coltrane. Mother, this is Ethel Fulbright, my *fiancée*."

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Coltrane. I have heard much about you. I wanted to meet you."

Thus far the older woman had not spoken. What should she say? What position should she take with this smiling young man? He looked like a *fine* young man. That she could not deny. The young woman, too, was good to look at. She was pretty, very pretty, and she looked good. She looked happy, and she acted friendly. Surely Wilmer could not have said to her the things about his stepmother that it might have been expected he would have said. All of these things flashed through her nimble brain. She was face to face with a lady. She could see that. She must not fail to be a lady herself.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Fulbright."

"I have not mentioned it yet to Ethel, Mother," Wilmer smiled, "but I presume we shall drive over to where Jerry is tomorrow. Is there any word you'd like me to give him for you?"

How difficult it was to keep on hating this fine looking, gentle-spoken young man who smiled at her so pleasantly. She had wanted to see Jerry. However, she had no prospect that she could do so, owing to her straitened circumstances; but to send him her mother's love and greeting after all these weary, lonely years would be something. But could she humble herself enough to ask Wilmer to carry a message for her? While she hesitated a moment, thinking of these difficult matters, Ethel said, "Couldn't she go with us,

Wilmer? Neither she nor I is very big. The three of us could ride in the coupe."

"Could you go, Mother?"

"We'd stop tonight at my mother's home, and get an early start tomorrow. We could bring her back here the day after tomorrow, couldn't we, Wilmer?"

"Surely, Mother, we could do that. Miss Fulbright lives at Clinton, and Jefferson City is less than a hundred miles from there. Mrs. Fulbright is a lovely Christian woman, and she would be glad to make you comfortable for the night. If it seemed to you necessary we could get you back here tomorrow night."

A conflict raged in the soul of the older woman. Oddly, at least it seemed so to her, the scene when two dimes were missing was re-enacted before her. She remembered that the mystery of their disappearance had never been solved. She accused Wilmer, and all these years had believed that he was the culprit. Maybe it was *Jerry* after all. Wilmer was evidently a good man now, while Jerry, at least so it seemed, was a bad man.

She wanted to see Jerry. In all these years, he had never written to her or sent her any word. How would he look? Would he bear on his face the indelible marks of a vicious life? If she accepted Wilmer's and Ethel's kind invitation, and if it turned out that Jerry's face showed him to be a bad man, what position would she be in? Would she have to confess that she had been wrong and cruel toward Wilmer all these years? She

could not do that. Well, she would leave that undecided for the moment.

"You are both very kind," she said after an instant's pause. "If you are sure your Ma wouldn't consider me an imposition, and if you wouldn't feel annoyed to have an old woman along, I should be glad to go."

"It will give each of us pleasure, Mother, to make you happy. That is our chief aim in life, to make sad people glad. Get your things, and we shall go."

"Would you and Miss Fulbright like to go up and see the room that was yours when you were a child, while I make a little change?"

As they drove into the edge of a city, Wilmer said, "This is Fort Scott. Let us go to a nice restaurant and have a good, leisurely meal. We can do that and still get home before early bedtime."

As the three walked into the restaurant, another battle was raging in Elizabeth Coltrane's soul. She was getting more and more beholden to this boy whom she hated, and about whom she had never failed to use the strongest words of reproach to be found in her vocabulary whenever he had been the subject of conversation. A Golden Text she had learned in Sunday-school when she was a young woman flashed into her mind: "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." When she thought of this, she knew her cheeks were aflame. The fire on her head she guessed was making her cheeks hot.

"Now, let's take our time," Wilmer soothed, when they were comfortably seated. "I wish we might each have the best the menu affords. There is no reason why we should not take all the time we need, and so let us enjoy ourselves fully."

Mrs. Coltrane was too self-conscious to say much at first, but when Wilmer had told several amusing incidents that had marked his school life at the academy, and after he and Ethel had together described in a whimsical way their experiences as they sat at the restaurant table in Metropolis, the ice melted perceptibly.

The older woman had once been an accomplished conversationalist and now, although for years she had sulked, her tongue became loosened. She saw that the story the young people had told on themselves about their experiences in Metropolis, although tragic in fact, had been related in a humorous way. She admired their courage, and she appreciated the outspoken way in which they were taking her into their confidence. Eating with people has a peculiar effect on almost anyone.

"That is a wonderful story you two tell," she smiled. "At the *time*, you each felt you were passing through a tragedy; but now you can look back and amuse yourselves by recounting the circumstances."

"I didn't believe in hell at that time," Ethel laughed, "but I felt that I was in something that would pass very well for that dreadful place."

"There has to be a hell," Mrs. Coltrane declared

grimly and somewhat irrelevantly, "or some people I have known would have no fitting place to stay."

"I haven't told Wilmer in full how I suffered," Ethel rippled, purposely ignoring the unwelcome turn the older woman had given the conversation. "I may not tell it all until I have a right to call myself by his name; but those days when I attended his meetings and stared at his picture on the window card were the hardest to live through of any I have ever experienced. I thank God for the beautiful sunlight out into which He has allowed me to come."

"The way you felt about God, Miss Fulbright, must now seem very foolish to you. It seems foolish to me now the way I have felt toward Wilmer all these years. Why, Miss Fulbright—"

"Call me 'Ethel,' if you will be so kind. I like that name better between close friends."

This speech brought to Mrs. Coltrane again with crushing force the text that speaks of heaping coals of fire on the heads of those who hate us, and the flush of shame again reddened her cheeks.

"As I was about to say, Ethel, if that will suit you better — it sounds better to me, too, in view of the way you are taking a crabbed old woman into your young heart — I had such a bad case of mother-blindness that, God forgive me, I actually allowed myself to hate a little boy who could not help himself because I thought my own boy was an angel while Wilmer was black as possible by comparison. Today he is heaping coals of fire on my head, and they are

scorching me. I feel dreadfully ashamed to say what I have been saying: but when I have gotten it behind me, I expect to feel much better. Wilmer, I ask your forgiveness. I treated you most cruelly."

"Most gladly, Mother. In fact, I have been thanking God of late for the way you treated me."

"Why, Wilmer!"

"Yes, it is so. The Scripture says that 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.' When I look at Ethel and realize that if you had treated me so that I could have stayed at home I never should have seen her, I say, 'Thank God for all I suffered. Ethel would have been cheap at twice the price.' "

"Well, I declare! Does that make my bad treatment of you something good? I don't see how that could be."

"Oh, no, not that. It merely shows that we have a God big enough to make everything, no matter how bad it may be, bring good results to the people He loves."

"Well! But I do not see that it has worked good to me."

"It will, if you have patience to wait, that is if you love the Lord."

"That is where the catch is, I believe. I used to love the Lord, but I gave way for so long to my foolish mother-love for Jerry that I got to feeling critical of God."

"There is a text, Mother, that says, 'If we deny him, he will deny us,' but there is another one that says, 'If

we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.' "

"Maybe you and Ethel will help me to get back to loving God."

"Surely. Jesus has been loving you all the time, and He may use even such unworthy folk as we are to bring you back to where He can bless you again."

"Your father loves God."

"Well, the way you treated me caused him to go away and live alone these years. Possibly that in itself has been good for him. But when you write him, making everything right as you have done with me, and he takes you to his heart again, he will realize in a fuller way that the text is true. He will be able to see that all things in *his* life, no matter how bad they may have seemed or how painful they may have been, have worked out good for him."

"I believe it. When he does, even I, the guilty cause of all the grief, may be able to feel that it worked even for my good."

"Dad, if he had stayed in Parsons, probably would have been miserable always, even if his *home* had been happy. But in Cheyenne, he found work that suits him, and he has been happy at it, as well as very successful, even in his loneliness."

"Is he in Cheyenne? I am going to write to him this very night and tell him what I have found you to be. I shall eat very humble pie. I ought to, and I shall feel better when I have done it."

"You are feeling better now, if looks count for any-

thing," Ethel laughed happily. "When I first saw you you were the picture of chronic irritability. You look at least ten years younger now than you did then."

"I looked like a shrew."

"Keep trying to get the door of your heart open a little wider, Mother, letting the Savior in. Soon He will fill you so full of His own glorious self that your heart will be gay and your joy will be full."

To these smilingly spoken and gracious words, Elizabeth Coltrane made no response. The evil spirit would not allow his victim to escape without a strong fight. She thought of Jerry, her boy. No one was saying a good word for him. Locked up for life in a cruel prison, it seemed to her his own mother was forgetting him and turning her back on him. It would not be right for her to be happy. She wished she could recall the humble words she had spoken.

In a moment her feelings had changed, and again she presented almost as waspish an appearance as she had had when Ethel first saw her. The young couple, wise in the ways of Satan through many varied experiences in rescuing people from his cruel grasp, saw that something was going on in this woman's mind opposing her further progress in grace. With quick, understanding glances at each other, they prayed silently and continued to speak in a pleasant way about unimportant things.

As they were ready to reënter the coupe, Ethel said, "Should you prefer to get in first, or shall I? We want you to be in the position that you will like the best."

"Surely," Wilmer agreed, "we want to make you just as comfortable as we can."

Kind words and acts when they are the outgrowth of genuine love, have a tremendous melting power. Mrs. Coltrane knew instinctively that her young hosts would much prefer to sit next to each other and to have them display their eagerness to sacrifice their own pleasure for her comfort was used of God to soften again the crustiness that had momentarily returned.

"No dear," she said; "you get in first."

Mrs. Coltrane's lonely heart, since she had withdrawn into her shell at the table had felt again the aching void that had been her constant companion through the lonely years of solitude, and she wanted to get back to where she could be happy again. She saw that yielding to the loving solicitude of her young companions was the way to do it. From then on until she was in her room at Mrs. Fulbright's, she resolutely restrained herself from dropping again into her former modes of thought.

As she sat down with the good stationery Ethel had thoughtfully provided for her to write a letter to her husband, her heart grew softer yet and her eyes were misty.

She knew what she must say to bring back her husband's love, and she set about saying it, and saying it more strongly, really, than was necessary.

When she had humbled herself in the dust over the way she had treated Wilmer, she began to try to convince her husband that when she could be with him

again he would not find it necessary to urge her to let him see that she loved him. What it had been to be without him so long would ever be before her, and she would see to it that he had the kind of wife for which his heart yearned. When she was through writing her letter, her eyes were shining, even though the tears were very near to the surface.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AS WILMER, Ethel, and Elizabeth Coltrane passed the capitol building in Jefferson City and pushed rapidly along to the penitentiary, Wilmer said: "I presume we had best all go to the office. Ethel cannot see Jerry. The penitentiary rules, I am informed, forbid persons not relatives visiting inmates. They may not let *me* see him. We'll explain to them that I am his step-brother, and maybe they will let me go into the visiting-room. In that case, Ethel, you will have to sit in the office and wait until I come out. If they do not consider me a relative, Mother, Ethel and I will wait in the office until *you* come out."

Soon the trusty was dispatched to bring Jerry to the waiting-room, and the distracted mother was told where to sit while she awaited the coming of her son.

"Tell Jerry, Mother, that I came here to see him. Tell him I was planning to come alone before I thought of bringing you, and explain to him that the officers would not allow me to see him. Tell him I am sorry he is having trouble, and that I am praying for him that God will save his soul, and enable him, even here, to finish his life living for God."

What Jerry said to his mother or how he received

her, Wilmer never knew. When he and Ethel had been waiting perhaps thirty minutes Mrs. Coltrane came out of the visiting-room, her face drawn and her eyes filled with unshed tears. There appeared to be no spirit left in her. Her grief seemed more than she could bear.

As she approached the young couple, they saw her distress and sprang to meet her, both of them putting their arm around her, but not knowing what to say. With a supreme effort at self-control, she said, "I am ready to go back home. May we not go right away, Wilmer?"

As they drove out of the city, the stricken woman sat rigid and silent. For some miles, Wilmer and Ethel, out of respect for her grief, uttered not a word. Then Ethel began to sing softly:

Fade, fade, each earthly joy, Jesus is mine!
Break every tender tie, Jesus is mine!
Perishing things of clay,
Born but for one brief day,
Pass from my heart away, Jesus is mine.

"Each tender tie *has* faded," thought the sorrowing woman. "Every tender tie is broken." But she forced a change of thought. This reckless line of thinking brought no good results. Tomorrow George would be getting her letter. She believed he would arrange as quickly as possible to have her come to him. That would be joy.

It surely was strange, but everything looked as if Wilmer might be the rock against which she would be able to rest in her declining years. What she had vainly

hoped Jerry would be to her, maybe Wilmer *would* be. Music has power to charm and soothe, it is said, even the savage beast. Again the sweet young voice sent forth its loving message:

Farewell, ye dreams of night, Jesus is mine!
Lost in this dawning light, Jesus is mine!
All that my soul has tried
Left but a dismal void,
Jesus has satisfied, Jesus is mine.

"Do you know 'Jesus Lover of My Soul,' Ethel?" the older woman asked.

Instantly Ethel began to sing the beautiful old song, while Wilmer's strong tenor blended harmoniously:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Savior hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh receive my soul at last.

They sang through the four verses, and as they did so, the stricken woman's face relaxed. The Comforter came and, as only He can, took the pain out of her heart. In his very best days, she thought, Jerry had never tried to comfort her or relieve her care. Jerry had always been for himself. These blessed young people, with every natural reason for hating her, were exerting themselves to comfort her, and doing it, too, in a way so skilful that she was almost ashamed to feel as well as she was feeling. Ought she not really, as a mother's duty to feel sad over the way Jerry had

treated her, feel sad at least longer than she had? As this question presented itself, the singers began again:

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful power in the blood.

Mrs. Coltrane, in her younger days, had been quite musical, but for long years she had not felt like singing. Now, however, as the second verse began, she joined in with a quavering alto, singing:

Would you be free from your passion and pride?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;
Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide,
There's wonderful power in the blood.

"Here's Sedalia," Wilmer called out in a momentary pause in the singing. "Let's unload and refresh the inner man. I am quite a believer in eating at meal-time. What say, all?"

"The ayes seem to have it," laughed Ethel. "The ayes *have* it. It is so ordered. Park the car and lead the way, Sir Prince Bountiful."

"If it is all right with you, Mother," Wilmer said as they waited for their dinners to be served, we shall stay at Mrs. Fulbright's tonight and all gather around the piano and have a good sing. Then in the morning Ethel and I will drive you to Parsons, and I will begin to make arrangements for the meeting there."

"That is the only way there is to do, really; don't you think?" Mrs. Coltrane asked. "If you take me home tonight you will have to turn around and drive

back to Clinton; that is unless you should leave Ethel behind and go with me alone."

"That is out of the question, Mrs. Coltrane. Where he goes, I will go, as Ruth said. We can go down in the morning and attend to the things needing attention and get back here by bedtime."

So it was arranged, and when the morning came it found Elizabeth Coltrane bright and cheery. She had joined heartily in the prayer of consecration with which the young people ended the singing around the piano, and, fully restored to her position in Christ, slept for the first time in years the sleep of a truly happy woman.

In Cheyenne, George Fullerton received two letters, one from his wife and one from Wilmer. Reading the one from Wilmer first, he learned of the transformation the Lord had worked in Elizabeth's heart under the beneficent influence of Ethel Fulbright. Wilmer's letter so accented Ethel's loving ways as the controlling influence that his own part seemed negligible. But when Fullerton read Elizabeth's letter, he obtained a better understanding of the situation, rendered obscure by Wilmer's biased account.

When the three arrived at Parsons, Wilmer, leaving Ethel with his stepmother at the Coltrane home, dropped in to see Mr. Henshaw. There the black headlines in the daily paper shouted to him that an old Parsons town boy, Jerry McTavish, with another hardened criminal, had escaped from the Missouri penitentiary. The account told of Jerry's mother, Mrs. George Coltrane, having visited him at the Walls only yesterday. She

was being sought for questioning, but thus far she had not been located.

As soon as Wilmer had read the account he said, "I think I had better call the chief and tell him Mrs. Coltrane has just arrived in town. It is not well for the impression to be out that she is in hiding."

Driving rapidly to his boyhood home, Wilmer told the women of Jerry's escape and warned his stepmother that she must be ready to be taken to the station for questioning. Jerry's escaping so quickly after her visit, coupled with the fact that no explanation had been found of the fact that he had a gun, had turned suspicion in the direction of the prisoner's mother.

When the detective asked Mrs. Coltrane to go with him to the police station, Wilmer and Ethel stepped into the waiting coupe and arrived just behind her. When the officers had heard the detailed account of the trip to Jefferson City; how it was not premeditated, but decided upon in a moment when Ethel had proposed it; and how Mrs. Coltrane had never heard from Jerry since he had run away from Parsons many years before, they decided to release her.

Jerry McTavish, with his convict companion, Jess Parks abandoned the stolen automobile in the business section of Marshall, where each bought a Bible and a suitcase. On the train to Kansas City, they handled their new Bibles with damp and dirty hands until they looked like well-used books. Fearing their clothes, taken from the two young men they had held up on

the highway might betray them, they broke into a used-clothing store in Kansas City that night and outfitted themselves with two suits each, of quiet colors and conservative styles, also helping themselves to clean shirts, collars, and black, clerical ties. From there they went to a moderate price hotel where they registered as "Rev. John Thomas," and "Rev. Andrew Slagel."

"No cigarettes, Pal," Jerry said, "in public places. No loud words, no winks or jokes. We are ministers looking about for a place to hold a revival-meeting. We'll always carry our Bibles, and whenever we are in view of others, we'll read in them."

"It's a tough part to play, Jerry," Parks replied, "but its the best way I know of to keep from being recognized."

"There is a young woman in Clinton, Jess," Jerry schemed, "named Ethel Fulbright, engaged to be married to my rich stepbrother. His mother left him a fortune, and he is such a tightwad he has more now than he had at the beginning. We'll pose as evangelists in Clinton and watch our chance to kidnap the girl. Then we'll make Wilmer, that's my stepbrother's name, come across with a few thousand dollars ransom."

The pseudo-evangelists spent most of the daylight time in their room at Clinton, but at night they told the landlady they were going for a walk. They were so friendly and obliging, and paid their board and room rent in advance for two weeks so graciously, that the woman was quite taken with them. They were evangelists, resting a bit between meetings.

When they had found where Ethel attended church, they spotted a good car they could steal and waited. The third night of their stay in Clinton they were standing in the shade of a tree watching the Fulbright home, when Ethel came out and started down the street alone. She walked two blocks and entered a home.

"Quick, Jess," Jerry hissed. "Get the car. Stop by and throw in our suitcases and get back here. I'll watch for her."

Two hours later, as Ethel was returning to her home, a car drove up beside her and stopped. A man spoke genteelly, inquiring how he could get to the highway leading to Kansas City. She did not notice the man on the sidewalk until she felt his hand over her mouth and heard him say, "Get into the car. If you keep still, you'll not be hurt."

It was a two-door car, and Ethel was in the back seat. Jerry sat beside her. The moon was full and the sky clear, thus making it light enough for Ethel to see that the two men who had occupied the car with her were hard-faced, determined looking men of about her own age. As the car got under way, a small boy who had been timidly hurrying up, seeing he was too late to do anything, paused a moment and then settled down to run in earnest. Without ceremony, he flung wide the door of the Fulbright home, shouting as he rushed in, "Miz Fulbright, Miss Ethel's been kidnapped. I saw a man make her get in a car. There was another man at the wheel."

"When, Charlie? Where?"

"Just a minute ago. It was right back there. I ran as hard as I could."

"Did she scream, Charlie? Did they hurt her?"

"The man had his hand over her mouth, and his pistol was against her back."

"Lord Jesus, show me what to do, and help me."

Stepping to the telephone, Mrs. Fulbright said, "Central, give me the sheriff as quickly as you possibly can. Ethel's been kidnapped."

In a moment, hearing a man's voice, she said, trying hard to speak calmly, "Mr. Baxter, Ethel's been kidnapped. Charlie Jones saw it and ran here to tell me."

"Where?"

"Just a minute ago. Two men, one on the sidewalk, the other in a car. Charlie says it was a Dodge, but he couldn't see the number."

"We'll get right on to it, Mrs. Fulbright."

"Thank you, Mr. Baxter. I know you will do all you possibly can. Yes, I know. Oh, I hadn't thought of that. She wore a navy blue street dress, and she was bareheaded. She carried a blue purse."

As soon as she had finished talking with the sheriff, Mrs. Fulbright called Kesterson's home.

"Wilmer," she moaned as soon as she heard his voice in the receiver, "Ethel's been kidnapped."

"Lord Jesus, help!"

"Charlie Jones saw it — just a few minutes ago — I called the sheriff first, and then you. I don't know what else to do. I am alone, you know. I wish you would come over here and stay until we get some news. Maybe

together we could think of something neither of us could think of alone."

How fortunate, Wilmer thought, as he hastily donned his coat and seized his hat, that I didn't go to Parsons this morning as I had intended doing. "Jesus, You are a very present help in trouble. I read it in Your Book, and I have found it to be true. This is the greatest trouble I have ever known. Help me now. Show me what to do. Give me courage and the right words to say to comfort dear Mother Fulbright. So glad she felt free to call on me for help."

What did anyone want to kidnap Ethel for? It couldn't be for money. Everyone knew the Fulbright's were in moderate circumstances. But if she were not kidnapped for ransom, what could be the motive? Could she have been carried off by some pervert?

"O God," he cried as he thought of this, "take care of Ethel."

Entering the Fulbright home, he heard the radio blaring the news that Ethel Fulbright, twenty-five years old, wearing a navy blue street dress and bareheaded, had been kidnapped a few minutes before in Clinton.

"The kidnappers," the announcer explained, "drove off toward the south in a Dodge car. A few minutes before the kidnapping a Dodge car was stolen in Clinton from Jasper Martin's garage. If this is the kidnapper's car, the license number is 376976. Highway patrol officers are instructed to watch all roads leading out of Clinton."

"It is wonderful, Mrs. Fulbright, in a time like this

to know that we have a God who answers prayer. The Psalmist says, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust the Lord.' Let us follow his example."

"I do thank God, Wilmer, for officers who know what to do and who do it without delay. All over the State keen-eyed men will be looking for Dodge cars. Surely the outlaws will be caught. I do hope they won't get into a gun battle with them and kill my little girl."

"Let us get on our knees and tell the Lord about it."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AS the bandit car moved out of the city and headed west, Ethel noticed that the man who was acting as chauffeur was driving carefully and at a moderate rate of speed. He evidently wanted to avoid being stopped by a traffic officer.

The words of a familiar song kept running through Ethel's mind. "Then's the time to trust the Lord," was the refrain, and she smiled faintly as she thought how little she had realized the seriousness of need into which one might be plunged when she had more or less idly joined with the congregation in singing it.

But she would take the advice. She would trust, and she would *not* be afraid. She knew God was her Friend and that He never sleeps. She knew He is almighty, and that, therefore, those who trust in Him have nothing to fear. Earnestly, but very quietly, she told the Lord of her need and asked Him to undertake.

"What are these grim, silent men thinking?" she wondered. They must be very nervous. She had much rather be in her place than in the position of either one of them. Could she possibly say anything or act in such a way as to be a blessing to them?

"God, help me to do it," she cried under her breath.

They allowed her to sit in the seat, and she could see out of the window. They were going west and south. No one spoke until about midnight the driver said, "We'll have to stop for gas."

As they approached the bright lights of a filling station, Ethel's seatmate said, "Get down on the floor out of sight. Be quick about it. Don't make any noise."

Sitting on the car floor, Ethel could see across the street. Recognizing an odd appearing structure, she realized that she was looking at the Flatiron building on Wall street in Fort Scott. When they were out of the city, she was permitted again to take her place on the seat.

"What are you planning to do with me?" she inquired pleasantly of the bandit by her side. "I know you cannot really hurt me, for my Friend whom no one can possibly outwit or successfully resist is here by me, and I have been telling Him how I need assistance."

"You may think you have a friend who will help you; but you've another guess coming. When Wilmer Coltrane digs up a tidy little piece of money, you'll be let go, but not till then."

"So that is it? Which one of you is Jerry?"

"H——!" exclaimed the astonished outlaw. "How do you know either of us is Jerry?"

"Why anyone with a speck of good judgment would know as soon as they thought of it that a bandit who would ask Mr. Coltrane for money to release me would be Jerry McTavish. No other bandit would know that Mr. Coltrane is deeply interested in me. Whichever

one of you is Jerry learned from Mrs. Coltrane about Wilmer and me.

"Another thing. Very few people know that Wilmer Coltrane is a wealthy man. He has very few friends who know it, and he lives so inexpensively that the underworld I am sure know nothing about it.

"Do you not see that as soon as the police begin looking for me they will begin combing the country for Jerry McTavish? Since you have been so foolish as to take me across a State line, G-men will be put on the case and they are a lot harder to keep away from than the State officers."

"How do you know we crossed a State line?"

"That is easy. That was Fort Scott where we stopped for gas, and Fort Scott is in Kansas. Did you not know you had carried off a woman who has something in her head to think with?"

"Jess, did you hear that? Those G-men I hear are the very devil to shake off your trail. That fellow Hoover ought to be hung!"

"It's just as she says," Jess growled. "The moment we ask ransom money from Coltrane they'll guess we are the guys who wrote the demand. This thing is gettin' too hot for me to hold."

"We can't let this dame go, for she knows us. If I rub her out, h—— will be poppin'."

For some time after this there was silence in the car. It was evident that the abductors were wishing with all their hearts they had not picked on this girl when they started the kidnapping game.

After a while Ethel said, "I love God, and He is my Friend."

"Is He the Friend you spoke about?"

"He is, and He will take care of me. You men cannot possibly do me any harm without first getting His permission. That you cannot do. God loves me, and He also loves you. His Son Jesus died under the weight and guilt of your sins and my sins and the sins of the whole world. God wants to *save* you from your sins. If you will forsake your sins and accept Jesus as your Lord, He will save *you*."

"None o' that for me," Jerry scoffed.

"My love for God makes me love everyone for whom Christ died, and that includes you two bad men. You see how very dangerous it will be for you to ask Mr. Coltrane for money, and you know I am of no value to you unless you do that. Moreover, God is going to deal with you for whatever wrong you do to me. He says, 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay.' I tremble to think what you will have to suffer for having tried to harm one who belongs to God and who cries to Him.

"But if you will abandon the car with me in it, I will not start the motor for thirty minutes, giving you time to get clear away. If someone should stop to inquire why I am standing where I am, I will make some excuse to avoid telling the real reason. I will never tell anyone but my husband-to-be who kidnapped me, and I will guarantee that he will never pass the information on to anyone else."

"How do we know you would do that?"

"You will just have to trust the spoken word of a woman who fears God."

Again silence fell in the car, as it continued to eat up the miles, speeding toward Oklahoma. Then, "What say, Jess?"

"All right by me. She's too hot to hold. I kinda believe she'll do what she says."

"All right. Turn down the first side road you come to and stop. We'll take our suitcases and beat it. We are obliged to you, Miss Fulbright. May we really trust you to sit here for thirty minutes before you start the car and never tell who we are so it will get to the police?"

"You may trust me, men. I only hope what I have said and the way I have acted while I have been with you will lead you to repentance."

When thirty minutes had expired Ethel started the motor and began her long, lonely trip home. The first town she came to she found the telephone exchange and called her mother.

"Hello, Mother. Yes, this is Ethel. I am all right. I was kidnapped but my abductors have fled, leaving me in possession of the car, and I am on my way back. Yes, I have money enough for gas. Please tell Wilmer, poor boy! He must be half crazy. Right there by you? Hand him the receiver, will you, Mother?

"Hello, Honey. I don't know just where I am. Some little town in Kansas. Yes, I am all right. Not hurt at all. I have a good car, and I hope to be home before noon. Now, you and precious Mother go to bed and

both of you look fresh and sweet when I drive in. I am so eager to see you both. Tell Mother. Good-by, darling."

About the middle of the forenoon, when Ethel had only twenty miles more to go to be at home, she became aware of a car by her side. A man with a gun in his hand and wearing a bright star on his coat, said, "Please stop your car, Madam. We must talk to you."

Knowing that she was driving a stolen car, and that she was being stopped by officers, her heart missed a beat, but instantly she realized she had nothing to fear. She slowed her car and brought it to a stand off the highway.

"You are driving a stolen car, Madam."

"I know it, officer. I am Ethel Fulbright. I was kidnapped last night and carried out into Kansas. A while before daylight, my abductors became alarmed over what they had done and, upon my promising them I would not tell who they were, they gave the car over to me and left."

"That is a very strange story, Miss Fulbright, begging your pardon."

"I do not blame you for doubting it, officer. It *is* a strange story. Fortunately, however, we are not far from my home. If one of you will ride with me to Clinton I can satisfy you that what I tell you is true, strange though it be."

"Very well. I will ride with you. No doubt you are telling the truth. Your eyes are convincing. But I dare not take a chance."

As the car got into motion, the officer inquired, "You say you promised the men you would not report them? Do you know who they are?"

"I know one of them. I feel that even a *man* can understand I should be willing to make such a contract with them in order to escape and get back to my distracted mother."

"But now that you are clear of them, why not tell who the one you know is?"

"I fear God, officer. You should fear Him, too. Do you not think so?"

"I should think your God would excuse you for breaking a promise you must have made under compulsion."

"My God stood by me, and in answer to prayer filled the hearts of those bad men with such fear that they let me go. I should not be so ungrateful as to break my word. He is a God of truth, and it would grieve Him at His heart to have me tell a lie. I cannot keep you from looking this car over for fingerprints, but I must be excused from talking."

When they got into the business part of town, Ethel said, "Where shall I drive? I have lived in this town for several years. Almost anyone you care to ask will tell you I am all right."

"Turn in at this filling station, please."

As the car stopped, a young man came running out, and as he did so he called, "Hello, Ethel. Where'd you come from? They've been broadcasting for you all night."

"I am under arrest, Joe. The officers found me driving this stolen car, and they want to know why."

"I don't know how it came, officer," Joe Shannon said, "but whatever Ethel Fulbright tells you is so."

"Do you know whose car it is, Joe?"

"Jasper Martin missed his car. Yes, this is his Dodge. He'll be mighty glad to get it back."

"Do you know Jasper Martin, Miss Fulbright?"

"Surely, officer. He is cashier of the National Bank. Shall I drive around there? He will tell you I am all right."

When in a few words Ethel had told her story, Jasper Martin said, "Officer, this girl is above suspicion. Anyone in this town would believe anything she would say, absolutely. This is my car. Can you not release her from custody now?"

"I surely can, Mr. Martin, and right glad I am that I can."

"Would you be good enough to take me home, Mr. Martin? I have been riding constantly since last night, and I must look a fright. I don't want to be seen on the street."

"Gladly, Ethel. I am mighty happy to be the one to bring you back to your frantic mother. How *did* you escape, and how did you get possession of the car?"

"I talked to the kidnapers about the Lord, telling them how God loves His own. I told them I belonged to God, and that God is a real Friend of mine. I told them how big and wonderful He is and how He never sleeps.

"Then I told them my God would do something dreadful to them if they did me any harm. When we passed through Fort Scott, I recognized a building there and knew what city it was. I told them they had taken me across a State line and that the G-men would be on their trail. As they realized the truth of this statement, they became so frightened that they abandoned the car with me in it.

"I have been repeating the words of the Forty-first Psalm as I drove along, the whole morning: 'By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.' Are those not wonderful words? They fit my case exactly."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"EARLY in the morning of the day Ethel returned to her home, KWTO broadcasted the information that Ethel Fulbright had been kidnapped from her home in Clinton in a Dodge car bearing the license number, it is believed, 376976, occupied by two young men.

"At about the same time," the broadcaster continued, "two young men who had been in Clinton posing as ministers, and giving the names of Rev. John Thomas and Rev. Andrew Slagel, abandoned without notice the home where their board and room rent had been paid several days in advance. Quick-witted officers ask that anyone seeing these alleged ministers notify local officers or call this station at once."

When Jerry McTavish and Jess Parks hurried away from the parked car, they were thoroughly frightened. The same God who "made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host," so that they said to each other, "Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us," and caused them to leave their tents and their horses and their asses and flee for their lives, was present and active that night in Kansas. An unreason-

ing fear gripped the hearts of the two desperate men because of the words of the girl they had kidnapped, and they also fled for *their* lives. They hurried along the highway, each with his Bible in his hand until they came into the city of Winfield.

"Let's go and get some sleep," Jerry proposed. "We are safe enough for the moment. The girl cannot have spread the alarm yet, even if she should break her word."

"I don't believe she'll give us away, Jerry."

Entering a hotel, they aroused the sleepy night clerk, signed the register, and went to their room, where they at once fell asleep. Just before the night clerk was relieved, he listened idly to the broadcaster telling about the kidnapped girl, the stolen car, and the two ministers. Instantly, he became wide awake. Those were the names appearing last on the register. The two hard-looking "guys" carrying Bibles were the very ones the broadcaster mentioned.

When the sleepers were rudely aroused by loud pounding on their door and were called upon to open it in the name of the law, the warning and threat of God as it had been voiced by their victim flashed through Jerry's mind, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay."

No doubt God was taking vengeance and they were in the hands of the officers before they had gotten even fairly started on the life of crime they had planned for themselves.

"Mother, dearest," Ethel said as she stood looking out the front door of the old Coltrane residence in Parsons, "you don't know how eager I am to get back into my life work with Wilmer. I can hardly wait for him to return with the road maps. It seems an age since we held the last meeting together."

"I am glad for you, Ethel. I have been seeing how hard it has been for you to remain in seclusion. By going with you to care for the baby, I too shall have some share in the successes the Lord will give you and Wilmer."

"Wilmer is coming now, Mother. He has a lady with him. Who can she be? There is something familiar about her appearance.

"Josephine Garby! Where did *you* come from? It surely is good for tired eyes to look at you, you sweet thing. Mother, this is Josephine Garby, a lady I met when I was assisting Jennie Sloan at Caruthersville. Meet my mother, Mrs. Fulbright, Josephine. I am glad to see you again. Wilmer, I suppose she has told you that she is the one I wrote you about meeting."

"Your prescription worked with me, too, Ethel," said the visitor. "The Gospel of John showed me the way back to God as it did you. But I am not Josephine Garby. Like you, I have changed my name. My husband's name is Templeton."

"How did you know that Wilmer could bring you to me?"

"Jennie Sloan told me who you married, and I heard

this morning that a man of that name was here. The rest was easy."

"How good God is to let me see you again and to hear you saying you found your way back to God."

"I am surely delighted, Ethel, to meet again the one who is the human author of my salvation. There are no words in the language adequate to tell the value I set on my renewed faith in God. I have made a happy woman out of a mother who was grieving her life away because of the unbelief of her girl. I shall tell her that I met you. Maybe we can arrange to have you and your husband conduct a revival in our city."

"Your speaking thus of a revival makes me hope you agree with us as to what one of the prime reasons is for God's saving a person."

"Meaning what, Ethel?"

"God wants men saved. He wanted it badly enough to make the supreme sacrifice of the life of His only begotten Son. He has never changed, and consequently He wants men saved today just as much as He ever did. So when He saves a person surely one of the best things He hopes will result is that He will have another assistant in getting men saved."

"I see," replied Josephine Templeton thoughtfully. "I got from you the idea that resulted in bringing me back into happy communion with my Lord. Now, if I mistake not, you have given me an idea that will result in my life's work becoming useful to the Lord in a way it distinctly never has been. I do thank you."

"It doesn't take a woman with a liberal education

long to see a point," Wilmer praised. "You grabbed that mighty concept my wife handed you like a trout grabs a fly."

"If I have the agile brain that your words suggest, Mr. Coltrane, that fact only adds to my responsibility. To whom much is given, of her much is required. I thank you for that additional thought. I hope to become as busy for my Lord as Ethel was when I first saw her." When, after a delightful visit around the dinner table, Mrs. Templeton was gone, Ethel enquired: "Did you get the road maps, Wilmer? I am half wild with longing to get back into active service as an evangelist's helper."

"Yes, here they are. I had the tent shipped to Cheyenne by freight, and the loud speaker equipment has gone by express. How would you like to start today and drive to Jefferson City, expecting to go from there to Cheyenne? I should like to see Jerry. Maybe he has been reading the Testament I had sent to him right after they brought him back. I wrote him a loving letter, telling him how much I appreciated his letting you go that night in Kansas and assured him you got home without a scratch."

"He has never answered, has he?"

"No, but maybe he would see us, and maybe if he would, we could get him to accept the Savior. At any rate, we could tell him the good news about his mother's being so happy out in Cheyenne."

"They wouldn't let you see him the other time you tried, Wilmer."

"No, but if you will go with me to the warden, I believe he will let us in as ministers. When we explain things maybe God will give him a heart to let us in where we can see Jerry."

When the runner called for Jerry McTavish and brought him to the visiting room, he was amazed to see Wilmer. But who was this smiling, sweet-faced lady? He had never had a good look at her, owing to the darkness, and he did not recognize her at once.

Often he had thought over his mad act in kidnapping her and laying himself liable to a possible death sentence. For a while after he had been returned to the prison, he had been nervous lest she should report him to the Federal officers. But he had finally decided she was keeping her word and quit worrying.

When Wilmer wrote him about having asked the publishing house to send him a Testament, he felt it was a very strange thing for Wilmer to do. It looked as if the girl had not even told her sweetheart who had carried her off. He decided he would read the Testament when it came and see what it was that made Ethel and Wilmer so queer.

"Good evening, Jerry," Wilmer breezed; "this is my wife, Ethel. You have seen her before, but possibly you may not remember her."

Ethel reached her hand through the bars, smiling. "So glad to see you again, Jerry. Things are so much better with us than they were the last time I saw you. We are each far better off. Do you not agree with me?"

"Maybe so. I could be worse off, I suppose."

"Your mother lives in Cheyenne now, Jerry. She and Dad are having the time of their lives. He is making a striking success in business. He got into something that he enjoys working at, and she is making him very happy in the fine home he has bought."

"She wrote me about it."

"We are on our way out there to hold a big revival. That is, we intend to drive there from here. I suppose you can scarcely call it being on our way, for we came east to get here, and to be on our way going to Cheyenne, we should be going west. We didn't feel like starting out together again evangelizing without first seeing you, so we drove this way."

"I don't see why you wanted to see me."

"We pray for you every day, Jerry, asking God to open your eyes so you can see how lovely Jesus is, and we want you to serve Him. We wanted to see how our prayers were being answered."

"Don't you hold against me any of the mean things I did to you when we were boys, or my kidnapping Ethel here?"

"No, Jerry. I *could* get into a fighting spirit over such things. Sinners do. But we let the Lord do all our fighting *for* us, so we can always have peace in our hearts."

"So that's it. I understand that a little better than I could have done before I escaped from the Walls. Ethel told me that night that God would take vengeance on us, and it was hardly five hours before the law had us, and the next day we were back here."

"Yes, people who really trust God to do all their fighting and all their hating, and all their evil speaking, are saved from a world of soul-devastating things, and God does the work that needs doing in the most effective manner. But those who trust Him must keep entirely within His way."

"It looks like it, for sure."

"I wish you could go with us to Cheyenne, Jerry. We want to come in and have another little talk with you tomorrow before we leave. Should you like for us to bring the baby?"

"Have you a baby?"

"Sure thing, Jerry. She is three months old, and the living image of her sweet mother. If the warden will let us, we will bring her to see you tomorrow. You will love her, I am sure."

"What's her name?"

"We named her Marcia, after my own young mother, Jerry. She is very sweet. We will bring her in in the morning if we can get in."

Ten years have passed since Jerry reached his hand through the bars and gently touched the cheek of little Marcia Coltrane. Good Mr. Henshaw and his faithful wife lie side by side in the cemetery at Parsons. Carrie also has fallen asleep. George Fullerton has retired from business, and he and Elizabeth live very happily in the suburbs of Cheyenne. He has a shop fixed up in his basement where he spends happy hours every day tinkering.

"Wilmer and Ethel are coming, George," Elizabeth

said one day, as she displayed an open letter. "I have a letter telling us about it. It just came. They are bringing Marcia, and little George, and the baby. They have called it Hester. They say they have a great surprise for us. I wonder what it can be? Aren't they the dearest children in the world?"

Two days later, when the car drove in, Elizabeth was the first to see it. She hurried out, greeting Wilmer and Ethel with that scant attention that grandmothers give mere sons and daughters when grandchildren whom they have never seen are to be exhibited. She didn't notice the glad-faced man who sat in the seat with Wilmer until he spoke.

"Mother," he greeted, "I haven't seen you for a long time. Will you forgive me for all my misdeeds?"

"Jerry!" exclaimed the mother. "O Jerry, I am so glad to see you."

Springing from the car, Jerry McTavish seized his mother in a bear hug, actually lifting her off her feet. Just then George Fullerton came hurrying out and began greeting the children before he paid any attention to the grown-ups.

"Father," Wilmer said, "this is Jerry."

Astonished, the older man looked at Jerry as if he saw a ghost, making no move toward him.

"He has lived such an exemplary and useful Christian life in the prison these ten years since we first took little Marcia to see him," Wilmer explained, "that when his case was properly presented to the Governor, he was granted a pardon."

"By God's grace and help, Father Fullerton," Jerry promised, "I will be as great a blessing to you in your declining years as I was a curse before."

The End

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